SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 369. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 25TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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No. 369.] For the Week ending January 25th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

No. 2 Box, Warnborough Loop.

A COSY fire was burning in the little signal cabin known as the "No. 2 Box, Warnborough Loop." This cabin was about midway on a loop-line of about nine miles that left the main line at Stanford Junction and joined it again at Warnborough. It was used as a relief line upon which some of the regular and most of the extra day traffic was worked. The cabin in question adjoined no station, but was there for the purpose of protecting a level crossing. About three miles further on was a similar cabin, "No. 3 box," and then came Warnborough station.

Only two or three scattered houses stood near the cabin; one of them was the little cottage inhabited by the signalman, whose term of duty lasted from ten a.m. till nine p.m., there being no night trains run on the loop. Another was a house in which I resided. I was the foreman of the "Warnborough loop" gang of platelayers, and often when my work for the day was over it was my custom to repair to the signal cabin for a pipe with Joe Bradford, the signalman. This, of course, was contrary to strict regulations, but I am afraid I winked at them occasionally. Sometimes I even went so far as to work the signals myself, and often I would assist Bradford in making the train entries, he being rather a slow writer; in fact, I knew quite as much about the work as Bradford did himself.

On the evening in question Bradford was very much "down in the dumps," and I had dropped in to cheer him up a bit. He was a widower and lived with his daughter, Elsie, of whom he was passionately fond. She had taken a chill a short time previously, and was laid up with a very bad attack of pleurisy. The doctor had been in the morning and had pronounced the case to be a very serious one, especially as the weather was bitterly cold—it was the 21st of January, I remember seeing the date on Bradford's tablet calendar.

It was a little after half-past seven in the evening, the night was pitch dark, and one turned with a feeling of comfort to the cheery fire which was blazing in the cabin. Bradford stood in front of his instruments; he was expecting every moment to receive a message from Stanford to the effect that the 7.37 train to Warnborough was being dispatched along the "loop." This train was sent round by the loop every evening

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to allow of the express from London taking the main line.

"Ah, it's heart-breaking work, Charlie, having to stay here, and that poor lass in pain. I wish I could be with her. And yet I suppose it's the duty that prevents me breaking down altogether."

"You don't feel like that, I hope, Joe?"

"No, mate. I ain't afraid o' breaking down. I feel the responsibility too much. But I don't know what I should do if it weren't for your wife's kindness. I know I can trust my gal to her."

My wife was nursing his daughter, and we were both glad to be of service to the poor fellow.

"Don't you think you might knock off for a week?"

"No, mate. It's better I should be at work. Besides, God knows my lass wants all the money I can earn her now."

A tap came at the door and my wife entered. She gave a swift glance at me that told me Elsie was no better. Bradford turned his head towards her without moving from his post.

"How is she, Mrs. Wilson?"

"Much about the same. She keeps crying to see you. You couldn't spare just a moment, could you?"

"Not now," he replied in a husky tone, "maybe I'll come presently, though it's against the rules."

My wife gave me a pleading look. I knew it was wrong of me, but I said to him:

"Can't I work the 7.37 through for you?"

"No, Charlie; it wouldn't be right. I'll drop in as soon as I can, ma'am. Ah!"

The bell rang. The 7.37 was leaving Stanford, and the signalman in "No. 1 box" was advising us thereof. My wife left. Bradford returned the signal, received the answering message, turned the wheel which closed the gates of the level crossing to the road, and opened them to the line, and pulled the levers connecting with the semaphore signals. The needle of the "block telegraph" now pointed to "train on line," referring to the "block" between No. 1 and No. 2 cabin, and Bradford passed on the "be ready" signal to "No. 3 box."

Meanwhile, I had risen, and with Bradford's permission was entering the train in his "log-book." I remarked that it had started about three minutes late. Presently we could distinguish the head-lights of the engine in the distance, and the mysterious rumble which always heralds an approaching train.

Crash! Bradford had put one of the levers back as the train passed the "distant signal." In a few moments we looked out on the rushing line of lights. Crash! the second lever was reversed, the train having passed the signal beyond the gates, and once more the red light shone forth into the night. The message was sent back to No. 1, "line clear," and the needle pointed to these words on the dial. "Train on line" was wired to No. 3, who responded by fixing his and our needle to those words on the dial belonging to the "block" between us. I entered in the book the time the train passed our cabin.

Bradford opened the gates again, then he stood before his instruments waiting for the signal from No. 3, when his duty in regard to this particular train was over. Very soon the bell rung, was duly answered, and the needle on the "tell-tale" dial swung back to its normal position of "line closed." I made the third entry in the book, stating the time at which the train had cleared "No. 3 box."

Then Bradford turned to me with a sigh of relief, and said:

"Now there isn't another train due before the 8.40 from Warnborough, for it's a very rare thing to get any extras running over the loop after seven. I'll just run over the road and see my poor lassie for five minutes. You'll stay here, won't you, mate?"

"All right, I'll stop. But look here, Joe, supposing anything happens. What am I to do?"

"Oh, I shall be back before that. There's no danger, but if the bell should ring, rush over to me at once."

I promised to do so, and he went out. I sat down by the fire and puffed away at my pipe lazily. Five or six minutes passed, certainly not more, and I happened to glance aside at the instruments, when, somewhat to my surprise, Bradford was standing in front of them once more. I thought for the moment it was rather strange that I should not have heard him enter the cabin, and then said:

"Well, how is she, Joe?"

He made no answer, and I was about to repeat the question when the bell in front of him suddenly rang. I recognised it as a warning from No. 1 box. Bradford replied at once, and then *four* consecutive rings announced the fact that a special train was leaving Stanford for Warnborough by the loop. I rose.

"Lucky you came back, Joe, isn't it? Shall I enter it for you?"

He merely nodded in reply. I entered the train. It was exactly four minutes past eight. Meanwhile Bradford had done everything that I have described in the signalling of the previous train. The "tell tale" on the first block was at "train on line," and on the other at "line clear."

Presently I could see the approaching headlights of the special. They consisted of a green and a white light placed the one over the other in the centre, indicating that the train was bound for Highfield—a large town some twenty miles beyond Warnborough. As she passed the cabin I counted eight coaches with the brake-vans, which latter were "composite," with compartments for passengers in addition to that of the guard. The red "tail light" speedily vanished into the distance. Bradford had reversed the levers and opened the gates. I had "entered" the train, the first "block" pointed to "line closed" and the second to "train on line." Bradford stood in front of the instruments with his finger on the button ready to return the signal of No. 3 box. That box, as I have said, was about three miles further down the line. Trains generally did the distance in about six and a half minutes, and they took this length of time because of a very sharp curve about a mile beyond us, where they had to reduce speed considerably.

The usual six and a half minutes were over and yet no ring came—eight—nine—ten minutes and still the little indicator pointed to "train on line." Bradford's face grew paler and paler, but he never said a word in answer to my questions. In silence we waited. I glanced at the clock. It was almost half-past eight. *Something must have gone wrong!* It was a clear, calm night; I went to the window, slid it aside, and leant out into the darkness, listening intently for a few moments, but I could hear nothing. When I turned round *Bradford had gone!* For a whole minute I felt quite paralysed with alarm. Then I rushed to the indicator. It stood at *line closed*, and yet I knew that it was impossible for it to have moved *without the bell ringing twice*. I was making for the door when, to my relief, Bradford re-entered the cabin.

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"Why! Whatever have you opened the window for!" he ejaculated. "Isn't it cold enough?"

"Where have you been? Is she safe?"

"Safe? Poor lamb, I wish I could say she *was*."

"I don't mean Elsie. I mean the 'special.'"

"'Special?' *What* special?"

"Why the one that passed through over a quarter of an hour ago. What was the matter? Why didn't the bell ring if she's cleared No. 3? Why did you go out?"

"What on earth do you mean? You're dreaming, man! There's been no train since the 7.37. I should have heard it—you'd have sent for me."

"Do you mean to say you haven't been in here for the last five-and-twenty minutes?"

"Been in here? No, of course I haven't. I've been sitting with Elsie. Your wife will tell you so."

I went to the log book. There was the evidence.

"But look here, Joe. Here are the entries." He looked and looked again. He couldn't make it out. I told him the whole thing. He declared he had only just returned from his house.

"You've been dreaming, Charlie. You've done it all in your sleep."

"I suppose I must have," I replied; "but it seemed so real, every bit of it, except that I never heard you come in or go out."

"Well, let's make sure." And he wired to both boxes. They replied: "All correct." I could only conclude that I had undergone a kind of nightmare. Joe drew a line through the entries, marked "error" on the side of them, and initialed it. Very soon the up train from Warnborough was signalled and passed us, and then I left the cabin, pondering deeply.

The weather changed the next day, and with it Elsie began to mend. Bradford and I had several discussions over what we both concluded had been a most remarkable dream, until we decided to let the matter drop altogether.

It would probably never have been revived if it had not been for the strange sequel which I am about to relate. I will merely give the details as they occurred, and must leave the reader to judge how much of the supernatural played a part in them. Whatever view of the case be taken, however, it must be confessed that there was at least an extraordinary coincidence.

A year had elapsed, and I was once again smoking my pipe in "No. 2 box." Bradford was in good spirits. His daughter was about to be married to my nephew, a strapping young guard on the line, and he was very pleased with the match. She stood before us now, the picture of health and beauty, having brought us in two steaming cups of coffee.

"Where's Ernest to-day, Elsie?" said I, "I haven't seen him all the week."

"I fancy he's been up to London, Mr. Wilson, on the Highfield excursion. I had a note from him yesterday, and he was expecting that job."

"Ah, that was worked on the main line this morning," said Bradford. "Have a bit of supper ready for both of us soon after nine, will ye, lass?" he added, as she was about to retire.

"All right, father," she replied, and went out, closing the door.

"The 8.37's late to-night," remarked Bradford glancing at his clock. "She's generally well up to time, too."

I looked at the clock, and in doing so my eye rested on the calendar below, "January the 21st." I remembered the date in an instant, but said nothing, merely smiling to myself at the recollection of my strange hallucination.

"Ting."

"The 'attention' signal," Bradford replied.

"Ting, ting, ting (pause), ting." Ordinary passenger train. Everything was done as usual, and we stood waiting for the train to pass.

One of the signalman's duties is to see that the "tail lamps" on all trains that pass his box are properly fixed. These tail lamps are attached to the rear of the last vehicle of each train, and play a very important part in the working of the line. They act as danger signals should a train by any irregularity overtake another, for then the driver of the second train can see at once what is in front of him. They also enable the signalman to see that the *whole* of the train has passed him. Accordingly Bradford looked out of his cabin as usual while the train passed. There was the "loop-line" single red light on the brake-van. Everything was correct.

In a short space of time we received the signal from No. 3 box that the train had passed safely, and Bradford drew a chair up to the fire with the intention of having a comfortable chat and smoke. We had scarcely begun a conversation when the bell sounded. It was a communication from No. 1 box.

"Hullo," said Bradford, as he pressed the button in reply, "something extra, I suppose."

"Ting, ting, ting, ting," Four rings without a pause. *A special express train was starting from Stanford.* I made the entry while Bradford worked the instruments in silence. Presently, as I heard the rumble of the train, I looked along the line and could distinguish the head lamps—*a white light over a green.*

"The Highfield excursion," said my companion. "I suppose they haven't room for it on the main line."

Crash! Our lever had been put back. The train had passed the distant signal.

"Why, what's the matter, Charlie?" he exclaimed, for I had seized him by the arm.

"My dream!" I exclaimed. "It's exactly the same——"

"Nonsense—let go, man—I can't see her pass."

I can never tell exactly how it happened; I am not naturally superstitious, but the coincidence of the date and the whole scene seemed to stagger me at first, and then give me a wild desire to stop the train. I looked out as she rushed past, and counted *eight coaches, and the brake-vans were composite.* I glanced at the dial. The indicator was at "line clear" for the next block. Everything was right, and yet a mighty impulse came to me that I could not resist. It was all the work of a few seconds. I took Bradford by the shoulders, hurled him out of the way, and *reversed the second lever* which worked the signal about 250 yards down the line. The train could not have been more than seventy or eighty yards off when the green light changed into an ominous red glare. There was a whistle and I could see the sparks fly from the wheels as the vacuum breaks were applied to bring her to a standstill.

"Good God, Charlie! are you mad? Don't you see what you've done? You've stopped the train! What am I to do?"

"I couldn't help—" I began, when—"Ting, ting, ting, ting, ting, ting," *six consecutive rings* from No. 3 box. We both stared dumbly at each other, for we knew well what it meant.

Those six rings were the "*Obstruction Danger Signal.*"

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Something was on the line between us and the next box.

Bradford instantly repeated the signal according to regulation. Then he gave eight rings to "No. 3," thus informing him that he had closed the entry to the block in time.

"Charlie, you'd best get out," he said. "There's no knowing what's up."

"All right," I replied, and left the box. I was joined outside by Elsie, who had heard the whistle.

"What's the matter, Mr. Wilson?"

"I don't know. There's a block on the line somewhere, I think."

"How did it happen?"

"That's more than I can tell you."

It *was* more than I could tell her. I was puzzling my brain to think what had taken place. *How was the line blocked?* A train had been along only just before and must have passed No. 3 correctly, because he had signalled it. He dared not have done this if he had not seen the tail lamp on the brake-van, and as he had obviously seen this, it was clear that no vehicle could have broken away from the previous train.

While I was pondering over the matter, Joe put his head out of the window and waved a lantern as a signal for the train to back towards the box. Slowly she did so. The rear guard was at his window as she stopped by the box.

"What's up, Mr. Bradford," said a well-known voice.

"Oh, it's Ernest," whispered Elsie.

"Hush," I said, "let's listen."

"Well, I can't quite make it out yet," replied Bradford: "but No. 3 says that something's broken loose from the last train between here and Warnborough—probably this side of No. 3—but no one seems to be sure where."

. It was a mystery!

"That's a rum go," said the guard. "Didn't No. 3 see her tail-lamp?"

"Yes, he says he did. Hullo! here's a message coming."

A few moments passed, and Bradford appeared again at the window.

"You've got to wait here for the 8.40 from Warnborough. She'll have a special engine on and will take you back to Stanford in her rear. Then you'll proceed to Highfield by the main (there were crossing points opposite the box so that the train could be moved to the up line). They'll spot the block coming along and report here."

Great was the grumbling among the passengers at the delay, though I don't think Ernest minded much, for he managed to have a quiet five minutes with Elsie while we were waiting. She, poor girl, was crying at the thought of his being so near a probable accident.

Presently the up-train was signalled, and came to a halt opposite the box. Then we learnt what had really happened, and a most extraordinary thing it was. It appeared that at Stanford Junction a "foreign" carriage truck had been attached to the rear of the train. Now the man who was responsible for attaching this truck had forgotten to take the tail lamp from the break-van and fix it to the rear of the truck. Both the signalman at No. 1 box and ourselves, therefore, had seen the red light on the brake-van, because on account of the lowness of the truck there was nothing behind to obscure it, and we had imagined that it was on the last vehicle—not seeing the truck at all.

This truck had broken loose on the curve I have mentioned, between us and No. 3, but, of course, the tail-lamp being on the break-van, appeared correct to the signalman there, and not until the train drew up at Warnborough was the discovery made. Now comes the second extraordinary coincidence. All our trains were fitted with the vacuum brake, and that meant that in the event of a vehicle becoming detached the pipes would break, and the vacuum act at once, *stopping the train*. How was it, then, the train in question was not stopped? Because this particular truck belonged to a company who had adopted the *Westinghouse brake*, and so could not be connected to the *vacuum*. Sometimes a *single* "foreign" truck (as in this case) is attached to the rear of a train without brake communication, but never more than *one*. It was this curious combination of circumstances that had caused the train to proceed to Warnborough apparently "all correct."

Little remains to be said, except that Bradford was complimented for his smartness in stopping the train. No. 3 had been in agonies for a few moments for fear his signal had been given too late, for if the train had once passed the outer signal post before the green light had changed to red, no one could have saved her from coming into collision with the truck right on the dangerous curve.

But no one ever knew that the red light had flashed out *ten good seconds before the signal was received*. We never mentioned that to a soul. I don't know whether you will call it a dream, or a warning, or only a mental hallucination, but of this I am certain—that if I had not reversed the lever on the spur of that momentary impulse, the excursion train would assuredly have been wrecked. The needle would have pointed to "train on line" long after the time that she ought to have passed No. 3 box.

VICTOR LORENZO WHITECHURCH.

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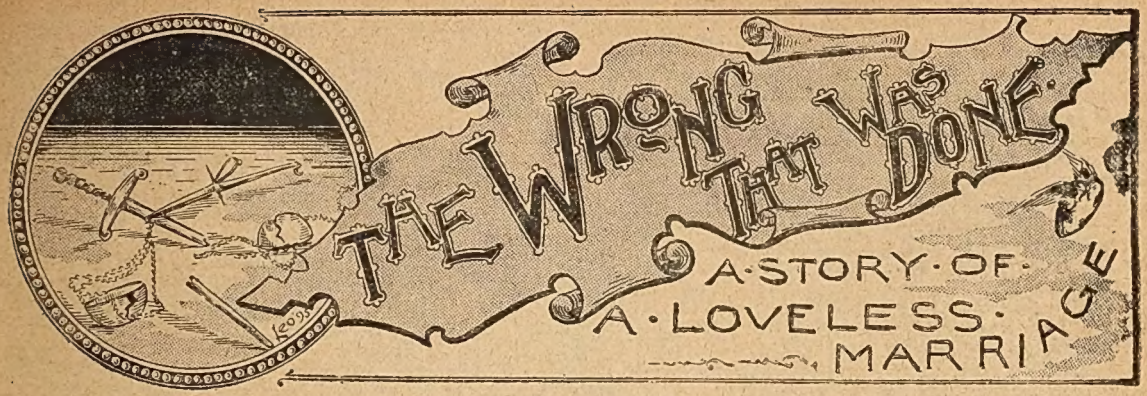

By E. C. WAGGENER.

CHAPTER X.

It was the last day of October. The first bright autumn days had given place to misty mornings and cold grey twilights, and the woods that only a little while ago were flaming in gold and russet and scarlet, had faded to sombre brown. Helen had grown strong enough to walk about the rooms, and sometimes, when the days were fair, even ventured as far as the garden, where she would sit for hours, her tired eyes fixed gloomily on the distant blue hills.

She was still very weak, however, and had grown so irritable and peevish that it required great patience on the part of Kitty to coax her out of her strange moods. On this particular day she had been unusually impatient and fretful. She had insisted upon having her lounge drawn up close to the window, where she could look out at the fading woods and fields, but had suddenly complained that there was nothing worth seeing, after all, that the light hurt her eyes, and she knew, she was very sure, that Kitty hadn't the least consideration for her in placing her in such an uncomfortable position.

Presently she fell into a doze.

"I will lower the blind a little," said Kitty, paying no attention to the peevish tone. "Now, that's better. The room is just dark enough to be pleasant, and you can enjoy the view without hurting your eyes. Shall I read to you?" she asked, a little frightened at the queer look in the beautiful eyes raised to hers.

"No. Why should you read to me? I am getting tired of being kept in the house all the time. Why can't I go out for a walk? It has been so long since I was in the woods. And the brook looks so cool and pleasant from here. I think I would like to bathe my feet in it, just as I used to do when I was a little girl. I'm certain I could walk that far if I tried really hard."

"To-morrow you may go," said Kitty soothingly. "You are hardly strong enough."

"I am perfectly well," interrupted Helen angrily. "You keep me shut up here day after day, as if I were a prisoner and you my gaoler. I am not allowed to visit any of the neighbours or to see any one but you and Betty and the doctor. I think it's very hard that I'm not permitted to do as I please in my own house."

"I didn't know you cared for company, or that you wanted to visit any of your neighbours," said Kitty gently. "You asked me not to allow them to come, and I have kept them away to please you."

"And I'm sure I *don't* want to see any of them," cried Helen, her mood suddenly changing. "Oh, Kitty, I'm so miserable!" she added passionately. "I wonder why it is that I live on when I want so much to die."

"Oh, Helen! live for *me*," said Kitty, taking the wasted hand in her own and holding it fast. "I will do my best to make you happy, dear. We will go away from here—anywhere you wish to go—and together we'll begin a new life. You are too young to wish for death—and I want you and need you so much."

"You know that you don't mean a word you're saying," exclaimed Helen, with a wild, strange laugh, wrenching her hand away and rising weakly to her feet. "In your heart, this very moment, you are wishing I would die, so you could marry Gifford. Why can't you be satisfied with knowing that, if I *am* his wife, he hates me and loves only you?"

Kitty looked at her with an expression of such pain and astonishment that her eyes suddenly lost their wild light, and her lips began to tremble.

"Don't mind me, Kitty," she said humbly, hiding her poor wasted face on her sister's shoulder. "If you knew what pain is here," and she passed her hand wearily across her hot forehead, "and how I long for Gifford at times you wouldn't think hard of me for the foolish words I say."

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"I know you are ill and troubled, and that you don't mean half you say," returned Kitty gently.

Helen sighed and looked wistfully out at the window.

"I have always loved this month," she said presently, breaking a little silence. "It is so bright and beautiful. And I have thought so often that, of all the months in the year, I would rather die in October. Kitty"—changing the subject abruptly—"do you remember the time we went to the woods and found those strange-looking leaves? It was in October, I think, for the woods were very pretty then."

"Yes, I remember it perfectly," said Kitty. "I know you said the leaves looked as if they had been dipped in blood, they were so red."

"I have them in my box yet. But they are faded and dead now. It has been so long, so very long ago, since I gathered them. What day of the month is it, Kitty? I think I have forgotten to count the days and weeks."

"The last day of October. Why did you ask, Helen?"

"Because I don't want to die in November. It is such a dismal month, and this one has been so bright and beautiful."

Kitty made no reply. With every evidence of a coming change before her, she could not bring herself to believe that Helen would die. Yet did she not lie awake night after night, her heart heavy with gloomy forebodings? Had she not watched for nearly four months the slow wasting of that pallid face with the despairing thought that it would soon be hidden from her sight for ever?

"Do you remember the time when we went fishing in the brook, and Ben Freeman caught the eel?" asked Helen, her mind reverting to the past again. "I have laughed many a time since then, when I thought of how scared you were when Ben tried to put it in your hand. Then, when Aleck Smith cut his foot with the scythe, the next day, how you screamed when you saw the blood, and how Aleck scolded and cried because I didn't tie it up fast enough. What happy days they were, Kitty! Even father's ugly ways didn't keep us from having a good time occasionally."

For nearly an hour she talked thus, sometimes rationally, again in a strange, incoherent way that frightened Kitty; yet her talk was always of the past. Not once did she refer to her trouble. She seemed suddenly to have forgotten it. Presently she fell into a doze, but soon awoke with a start.

"I think I shall go to bed," she said. "I feel unusually tired and sleepy. Perhaps I've talked too much to-day, but somehow I couldn't help it. Don't sit up long to-night, Kitty, for I won't need anything, and it really is not necessary for you to be so watchful of me. And tell Betty she may go to bed, too. I can't endure to have her sitting by me all night. She stares at me so. And sometimes she falls asleep in her chair, and snores so dreadfully that I can't rest a bit. I hope we'll soon be able to do without her."

"I am so tired of this old lounge," she added, when Kitty had helped her to undress. "Would you mind letting me sleep with you to-night, Kitty?"

"You know I will be glad to have you," answered Kitty, as she carried her over to the bed and tucked her snugly in. Then she stooped down and kissed her with unusual tenderness.

"Good-night. I shall not stay up much longer," she said.

The morning sun flooded the room with a golden light, one long bright ray falling directly across Kitty's eyes and waking her suddenly from a heavy sleep. She glanced quickly at the lounge, forgetting for a moment that Helen had asked to share her bed, and, seeing it empty, sprang up and crossed the room hastily.

A search was made through the house.

Then remembering, all at once, that she had fallen asleep with Helen's arms around her, she went back to the bed. But if she had been a little frightened and bewildered at seeing the lounge empty, she was alarmed beyond measure when she found that her sister was not in the bed. Her clothes lay on a chair just as they had been placed there the previous night, but Helen herself was not in the room.

Kitty felt a strange pain in her heart as she hastened into the adjoining room to arouse Betty.

"Betty, get up and help me to find Helen," she cried, shaking the girl roughly. "Her clothes are on the chair just as I placed them last night, and her slippers are on the little stool in the corner; but she is nowhere in the room! Oh, Betty, what does it mean? When and where could she have gone?"

"Isn't Miss Helen in bed and aslape?" asked Betty, yawning and rubbing her eyes stupidly. "Shure, I left ye both slapin' side by side as innercent-like as two babies."

"She is not in bed—she is not in the room," said Kitty excitedly. "Get up at once, girl, and help me to find her. Did she pass through this room? or have you been sleeping too soundly to see or hear anything?"

"Shure an' she's not fur off," said Betty reassuringly, as she drew on her clothes. "Do you look into the other rooms while I take a peep in the garden. She can't have gone fur, an' her so weak."

But a search through the house and a careful survey of every nook and corner about the place failed to show any trace of the missing one. By this time Kitty was almost wild with fear and excitement; and remembering Helen's strange mood of the previous day she hurried Betty off to the doctor, summoning him to her aid at once.

"It is very probable that she has wandered off to some of the neighbouring houses," he remarked, when Kitty had told him of Helen's singular disappearance. "Come, you must not give up," he added cheerfully, as he looked at her white, despairing face. "No doubt we will find her presently. I will get some of the neighbours to help me, and we'll begin the search without delay."

"I shall go, too," said Kitty eagerly. "I couldn't endure to stay here and wait. Anything will be better than this terrible suspense."

So a thorough search began; but it proved in vain until late in the day. Then some one suddenly remembered to have seen a white object moving slowly about the churchyard the previous night.

"It was nigh about midnight, an' I was comin' from the station when I seen it," he explained. "I run every step of

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the way home thinkin' mebbe it was a ghost. Hit might a-been *her*."

So up to the churchyard they went, and there, at the foot of a little child's grave, they came upon the object of their search, lying face downwards on the cold, wet grass, her white nightdress soaked with dew and stained with weeds, her feet torn and bleeding from the sharp stones and cruel briars that had bruised and lacerated them.

The night had brought Helen her wish. She was dead.

CHAPTER XI.

QUIET little Looe was full of unusual bustle and confusion one morning in the following April. Waggons and carts rattled noisily over the narrow streets, children laughed and played and sung in the bright sunshine, and even the surliest farmer, at work in his field, found it impossible to keep back a little burst of song or a merry whistle as his eyes took in the brightness and beauty of everything around him. It would have been a sad heart indeed that could not have found some pleasure on such a day, with its wild splendour of purple skies and budding leaves, its warm, sweet winds, and jubilant songs of bluebird and thrush and lark.

Had they not heard unearthly sounds?

For six months—ever since Helen's death—the little cottage had remained closed. Standing in the deep shadow of its waving trees, it wore a strange, desolate look with the glad tumult of life everywhere around it. The superstitious ones declared that it was haunted. Had they not seen, on dark, stormy nights a light burning in the window and the face of the dead girl pressed against the pane? Had they not heard unearthly sounds in the vacant rooms night after night? And had not the bravest man in the village been frightened away by the terrible groans and shrieks that had issued from the house when he had gone there to investigate? So it came about that the place was shunned even by those who were sensible enough to turn a deaf ear to the stories concerning it.

Vague reports had been circulated at first about the sudden and unexpected separation of Helen and her husband, but they were only uncertain rumours that could not be substantiated, the facts of the case never having become known. No one in Looe had seen or heard of Gifford Vane since his disappearance. He was as completely lost as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up; so the gossip and speculation concerning his probable fate had gradually given place to other thoughts.

Yet the gossip was suddenly revived this bright April morning by the sudden appearance of Kitty North in the village. At the station she merely nodded to the familiar crowd that was gathered on the platform, then hurried off in the direction of the deserted cottage.

"I wonder what she's up to now?" remarked a woman to her neighbour. "'Pears as if every time Kitty North comes to Looe some sort of trouble comes with her, or follers close after her. Maybe she's come after Helen's things. It's just a shame that them things is a-layin' in there, spilin' an' gittin' covered with dust an' mould, an' nobody to use 'em."

"Well, I'm shore *I* don't want 'em," said the other, as she set down her basket to watch Kitty. "I wouldn't use 'em fur nothin' in the world if I could he'p it."

"As fur that, neither would I," rejoined the first speaker, a slatternly-looking woman, who held a sickly child in her arms, which she was trying in vain to quiet. "I'd be afeard that anything from that house would bring me bad luck. There! I knowed she was goin' straight to the house. Now les' watch an' see what she's goin' to do."

Taking a key from her pocket, Kitty unlocked the door and went in, emerging, a few minutes later, with a small basket in her hand. Fastening the door securely, she hurried off down the garden path.

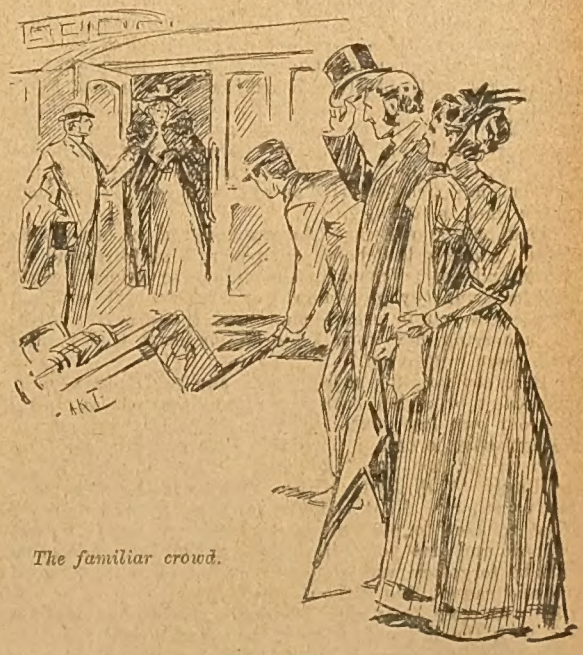
"See, she's gone to diggin' up flowers," said the woman with the child. "I wonder what she's goin' to do with 'em?"

"Plant 'em on Helen's grave, most likely," remarked the other. "I told you so!" she added presently, as Kitty came through the gate, the basket filled to the brim with flowers, and went slowly up the hill in the direction of the graveyard.

On reaching the graveyard, Kitty paused by a mound that was directly under a large yew-tree, and clearing it of the young, tender grass that covered it, she proceeded to plant her flowers—a white rose that of all her garden treasures had been Helen's favourite, a young lily that was sending out fresh green leaves, and a tuft of white violets already in bloom.

"Oh, Helen, Helen!" she whispered, as she bent over her loving task, "have all the bitter tears I have shed since you went away atoned for the past? Through the mysterious shadows that keep you from me, do you see and understand how dark and desolate life has grown to me?"

Presently, when her work was done, she sat down under the yew-tree, and, leaning her face in her hands, fell into a long and mournful reverie. It was not the Kitty North of



The familiar crowd.

old who sat there in that weary, listless attitude—not the proud yet warm-hearted and impulsive girl who had been so ready to give up the one love of her life that Helen might be happy—but a humble, sorrowful woman, out of the ashes of whose past no hope had yet arisen. Her face had grown thin and sharp, her eyes heavy and dim as though they

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were constantly shadowed with tears, and a grey hair gleamed here and there in the braids of her soft brown tresses.

"How fast I have grown old!" she said, pushing her hair from her forehead with a gesture of weariness and pain. "Is *he* as changed, I wonder?" And as if in answer to the question in her heart, she looked up to see before her, his eyes looking straight into hers—Gifford Vane!

"Now les' watch and see."

"*You* here?" she gasped rather than spoke.

"Yes," he answered quietly, but in a hard, bitter voice. "Don't look so frightened," he added, coming a step nearer. "I am no ghost."

Yet truly he was but the ghost of his former self, Kitty thought, as she looked at his changed, haggard face.

"Why do you come now, when it is too late?" she asked in a voice that shook with suppressed emotion. "Why —"

"I was sent away," he said, in a tone that awed her into silence. "I only heard a few weeks ago that she was dead. Answer me this: Did she hate me to the last?"

"No, she forgave you; she said so many times before she died."

"I wanted to come back, but I was afraid. She had told me that she hated me, and never wanted to see me again. What could I do but go away after that?"

Kitty was silent.

"Kitty"—speaking the old familiar name in a softened voice—"do you think she would have lived with me again if I had come back?"

For a moment Kitty hesitated.

"I'm afraid not," she said, in a low, unsteady voice. "She could never have trusted you again."

"I did not expect it after what passed that night," he said quickly. "Even after I heard that she was dead I was afraid to come. Yet I felt a strong desire to see once more the little home she loved so well, the garden she tended with such busy hands, and the grave where they had laid her to rest. By some lucky chance no one saw me get off the train last night, so I hurried on to the house and succeeded, after a time, in getting in.

"God only knows what I have suffered in the last twelve hours. Alone in that house, with everything to remind me of her, and not a friend in the village to whom I could look for sympathy or comfort! Kitty, we both wronged her deeply—you in urging me to take the false step I did; I in marrying her when I felt in my heart that I could never learn to love her."

"It is too late for regret now," she said with a sigh. "We can't bring her back any more than we can bring back our own lost youth. We can do nothing but endure the consequence of our miserable folly and mistake."

"It is *not* too late," he said, holding out his hands pleadingly. "Oh, Kitty, why can't we live the rest of our lives together? What is there to come between us now? What is there to prevent us from being happy? Forget the past and give yourself to me. Let all those miserable days be forgotten and come to me; for, oh, Kitty, I need you and cannot live without you!"

He was close beside her, looking down into her troubled face with the light of a great love and longing in his eyes; but she turned away with a little shudder of pain.

"My love died long ago," she said in a low voice, not daring to raise her eyes because of the utter misery she knew she would read in his.

"I do not believe it," he said fiercely. "Such love as ours will only grow stronger with the years."

"Listen to me," she said, her voice firm and sweet, yet strangely sad. "If Helen had not come between us, there was something else that would have kept us apart. You asked me once to explain to you why I remained hidden from my friends after I left auntie, and I refused to tell you anything—"

"But I was quite willing to take you to my heart again without an explanation," he interrupted eagerly. "I told you so several times, and I tell you the same thing now."

"But I want you to know. It is a secret that was known to no one but my stepfather. Perhaps he only guessed it. I do not know, and it matters very little now."

"Well?"

"Instead of teaching a school, as my friends thought, those four years were spent in an asylum. I knew you would start and turn from me; I knew you would shudder at the thought of ever caring for a woman on whom the curse of hereditary insanity rested."

"If it rested on you, did it not rest on Helen, too?" he asked gravely. "And yet you advised me to marry her!"

"Because I hoped and believed she would escape."

"And I am willing and ready to run the same risk with you. You are afflicted with no malady now; your mind is as clear and free from insanity as my own. And even if it were not it would not make the slightest difference to me. Who except the utterly wretched ever go mad? And I would guard you so tenderly."

"Hush!" she said, with a gesture of pain. "Helen, lying here in her grave, parts us more utterly than Helen living and your wife could have done. Forgive me," she added with sudden gentleness, "but you know as well as I that no happiness could ever come of such a marriage."

She looked up quickly as she spoke, and her eyes grew dim at the sight of his suffering face.

"Kitty," he said, his voice full of persuasive tenderness, "I tell you it is *not* too late for us to be happy. I gave you up two years ago, when my heart pleaded to keep you always—to suffer nothing to come between us; but I cannot give you up now, even after what you have told me. And I am not asking you to share a life of poverty with me. My uncle, from whom I had been estranged for several years, died two months ago, leaving me a rich man, as one counts the wealth of this world; but my money will bring me no comfort, no pleasure, no enjoyment, unless you share it with me."

"I cannot," she answered, her face pale and troubled. "I could never forget that you ruined Helen's life, and sent her to her grave in the bloom and freshness of her youth. Yet I wish to part with you in peace and friendship. Here, by her grave, let there be no bitterness between us, for, remember, she loved us both."

"There can be no such thing as friendship between those who have loved as we have loved," he said quickly. "I told you this once before. If we part it will be to meet as strangers hereafter, for I will never willingly cross your path again."

"Yet we will part in peace?" she pleaded, coming a step nearer, and holding out her hand.

"In peace? Yes," he answered, taking her hand and holding it as if he never meant to let it go.

"It is for the last time," she said, lifting her eyes, dark and troubled and full of misery, to his.

"It is for the last time," he repeated mechanically.

And thus beside Helen's grave, in the fair spring weather, they parted, these two who were destined never to meet in life again.

He turned as if to go, but coming back suddenly, gathered her in his arms, and, holding her close to his heart, kissed her pale lips as he would have kissed them had she been lying cold and lifeless before him.

"Good-bye, my love, my life!" he said.

And the next moment she was *alone*.

THE END.

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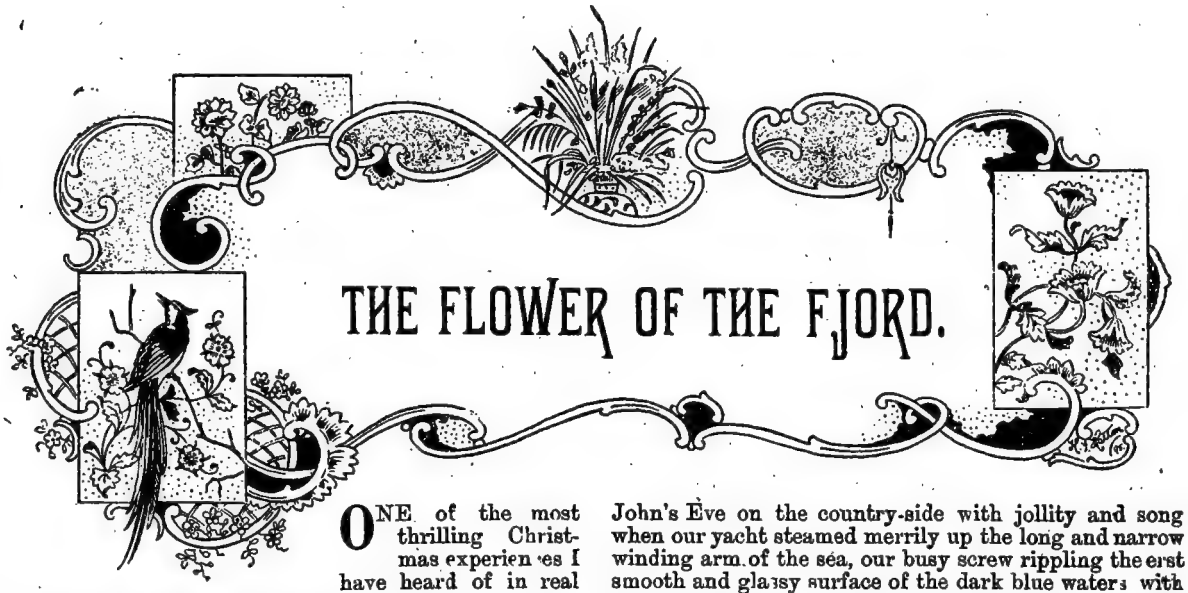

THE FLOWER OF THE FJORD.

ONE of the most thrilling Christmas experiences I have heard of in real life—so thrilling that I am glad it was not my own—happened to a friend of mine, Harold Harrison by name, shortly after he settled in Norway, some years ago. He shall tell you the story in his own way.

* * * * * * *

I shall never forget the Christmas Eve of 1888, nor the snow-clad cliffs that tower above the dark blue waters of Trondhjem Fjord. Two things happened then and there which will never be erased from my memory. One has given me some strands of grey in my black hair, some extra furrows on my forehead, and a weak right arm; the other has given me the keeping and cherishing of the fairest flower of womanhood that ever blossomed in the North.

In company with a well-chosen party of acquaintances, steady-going young fellows, not too studious nor too gay, I had journeyed to the Land of the Midnight Sun in the summer of that year, by one of the excellently appointed steam-yachts which voyage to and from the grim North Cape. It was my first visit to the famous country of vikings and sagas, and I need not tell how pleased and interested was I, who had lived for the most part in the smoke of London, with every fresh glimpse of the picturesque and wave-worn shore of the old Norseland.

After a most troublesome tossing on the choppy North Sea, our first halt was at Bergen, the town of fish and fishermen, where even the price of an article is told as so many herrings, or other of the finny tribe. Muscular-bodied men are the fearless fishers, powerful of jaw, shaggy of beard; with high cheek-bones, thickly-tangled hair, rolled-up sleeves, large boots, red shirts and coarse trousers, and invariably with knife and marlin-spike in hand. We spoke to several, finding them, despite their bluff appearance, surprisingly well-informed, and honest to the core. This will equally apply to those we met at Trondhjem, and all along the coast.

It was at Trondhjem, a town of 25,000 inhabitants, on the Fjord of that name, situated in 63° N. lat.—I like to be particular—that I first saw Thelma, the lovely daughter of the wealthy landowner, Brun Nillson.

They were keeping the mid-summer festival of St. John's Eve on the country-side with jollity and song when our yacht steamed merrily up the long and narrow winding arm of the sea, our busy screw rippling the erst smooth and glassy surface of the dark blue waters with unceasing whirl. On either side bold shores rose sheer from the water, snow-flecked peaks towering up to a sky softened by drifts of dull grey cloud streaked here and there with rosy tints of the low-down sun, while as the ship sped on, now appearing landlocked by the rugged hills, and anon steaming up a wider space, the tinkle and splash of tiny cataracts falling down the mountain sides struck pleasantly on the ear. Now and then came the sound of the shepherds' "jodelling" across the sparsely cultivated valleys inland, mingled with the bleating of sheep and the short, sharp barking of watchful dogs.

When, to crown this perfect picture of sea, sky, and shore seen at its best in the soft, slow dying of a summer's day, with the sun sinking to its lowest in a gentle glow of light beyond the western, mist-topped hills, I caught sight of Thelma on the landing-stage, waiting to send some message by boat, I thought that nothing more was needed to make it the fairest scene that human gaze had ever rested on. Thompson would tell you, no doubt, that I had no eyes for anything but the tall, fair girl in her holiday scarlet and brown, and he would be right, but was there not excuse for such concentration?

Who, looking into those large blue eyes, full of truth and trust; looking at that sweet young face—grave in repose, yet lightly moved to winsome smile and catching mirth—framed in its glory of pale gold hair; noting the healthy, witching outlines of the lovely form, and taking in at a glance the neatness and inexpressible charm of the homely attire, could fail to be enchanted with the vision, or, being a man, to fall in love therewith? "Of all men, not Harold Harrison!" said I.

Our stay at Trondhjem was not long, and I found no way that time of speaking to the rich Thane's daughter, but whether it was from chance or design, I found that when I strolled alone to the little quay, at what in lower latitudes was sunset, smoking my evening briar, Thelma, too, would be there, as though waiting for some one. Mostly, a girl friend was with her, or a sturdy brother, and always a big, rough hound named Wolf. How I fretted and fumed that I knew so little of Norwegian and so much of Greek; that I could read so much that

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had been written two thousand years ago, and I could not talk to this maid in the year of grace 1888. I resolved to remedy this defect in my education as soon as possible, and nearly worried the life out of Thompson, our champion linguist, in the furtherance of my resolve. Poor old chap! He put in a great amount of hard work as interpreter on that voyage, and would have gone home richer than he went away had he been paid at professional rates.

The others had no care for my mute romance, and so our yacht's prow was pointed for the mouth of the creek after a week's exploration of the vicinity. Amongst the crowd that gathered to see us off I noticed Thelma, and even thought I saw her cast a glance of longing and regret upon me as the trimly-built craft sheered off.

Up the rugged coast, with its quiet, dark inlets and black rocks, passing the one thousand feet high Raft Sund, and ever steering north, we came in turn to Hemmingsvaer and Svolvaer, and, higher still, to Tromsö, Hammerfest, and the Lofoten Isles, and thence, through the chilly waters of the Arctic Sea, to the gaunt old sentinel who guards the approaches to the frost-bound region of the Pole, the famed North Cape.

Black and vast it loomed against the clear, cold sky, frowning upon the round red ball of the midnight sun that flushed with crimson the scanty shreds of cloud hovering in the zenith, and cast a glittering path of dancing light upon the silent, solitary ocean, stretching, unbroken, to north and west, far as the eye could see. Grand, solemn, and sublime it rose from the sea that laved its base—in peace when we saw it—a striking type in its still impressiveness of the mighty forces which outlast the swiftly-ebbing tide of human weal and woe. Grander still must it appear when the storm rages round it, the wind howls fiercely from the portals of the unknown north, and the wild waves dash in vain, mad fury on its rocky sides, their high-flung spray wetting the patches of lichen which cluster on it, and mingling with the falling drops thrown off the white cascades which furrow its weather-beaten breast. I admired it like the others; but I thought of Thelma, wondering if she were waiting on the quay at that hour, and was glad when the ship's head turned, and her keel ploughed on to warmer southern shores.

We put in at Trondhjem again for another week, and by then, having gained a smattering of her tongue and spoken once with her, I was loth to leave my Thelma; so loth, indeed, that the yacht went back without me, bearing word to all in England, whom it might concern, that I had resolved to winter in Norway. The fellows chaffed me much, saying I was a lucky dog to get off my work so easily, and sardonically wishing me joy with the Flower of the Fjord, as they styled my charmer. Quoted Thompson, as a parting shot:

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I linger on the shore.

Left alone, I made headway with my Norwegian, for it needed little persuasion on my part to induce sweet Thelma to take pity on my loneliness, to present me to her family and friends, and to guide me, in her free, artless way, to all the places round where the prettiest views were obtainable, where the rarest flowers grew, where the best fishing could be had. I had already gained the good graces of gruff, staunch Wolf, by sundry surreptitious tit-bits, and with him leaping and bounding beside us, as though I had been his master all my life, we two went forth to the hills and dales, gathering the blue gentians from the snow-topped heights, the frost-lilies from the white-mantled tarns, the whortleberries from the sunny slopes.

At last I spoke to her of love, pouring out my passion-laden heart, and vowing to give up my native land and live at Trondhjem for her sweet sake, if so she desired. She listened gravely, not saying a word till I had finished, and, holding her soft, warm hands in mine, looked appealingly into her face for the verdict. Then she spoke; her words at once a message of pleasure and pain.

"I will not deny that I love you better than all the ruddy-haired wooers who daily sit in my father's hall," she said, "and—and I could not if I would. But my heart misgives me of the future. My people like not the dark southerners as kinsfolk, deeming golden locks a necessary thing in all good wives and husbands. Also, my parents design me to be the bride of young Olaf Jonson, whose temper is quick, and whose anger is to be dreaded. So I fear, and could almost wish that you had never come at all; and yet——"

"And yet," I broke in eagerly, "you are glad that I have?" She did not speak, but eyes have a language all their own, more easily understood and wider-spread than Volapuk, and her eyes answered "Yes." "As to all other things," I continued, "I care nothing for them now you have told me your love. Tell me, though, if you have any liking for Olaf, the tall, bronze-faced farmer who glared at me so evilly yesterday?"

Thelma shuddered.

"I distrust him, I almost hate him," said she. "It is so different with you, to whom my heart went out when I first saw you on the ship, as the perfume of the rose goes out to meet the strong west wind."

"As my soul longed for you that day, my Thelma, my Northern Rose," I said, extending the simile. "And, now you have confessed what I desired you to, I declare that I will never leave this place until you are my wife, and are willing to go, let whoever or whatever will stand in our way."

"We will hope for the best, Harold, my love," replied the girl, "but I fear."

Then we talked and acted after the usual manner of lovers, which is a tale too often told to need repeating here. The days sped on thereafter with a quiet happiness, save for the scowls of Olaf and the frowns of Brun, my dear one's father; and never was autumn so short as that. It seemed but a few days after the yacht had left the fjord when the snow began to settle thickly on the grand, grey, fir-clad hills and bare, scraggy heights; when the lonely cow with heavy collar was brought in and tethered in her stall; when the large, thick rye-cakes made in summer were taken down from the ceilings; when the miserable mongrel dogs that haunt the towns began to make night restless with their hungry howling; and when the skates were cleaned and oiled, and winter furs put on.

The lady-ferns had already turned to vivid red in the breath of the keen cold winds when Thelma and I joined hands in troth; but not till Christmas Eve, when the Yule-logs brightly blazed on the cosy hearths, could I claim her for my own with the goodwill of her people. This was how it came about.

All day long the jolly folks had been making ready for the festival of the Nativity, and when most of the country people had taken away their bulky purchases from the town, driving their sledges merrily over the snow, their comical-faced, short-bodied horses, thick of neck, stout of leg, large of head, and shaggy of mane and tail, plunging through the drifts with an eagerness

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that told of desire to be at home, I wandered up a steep and slippery path to a walk that wound along the edge of the fjord, where Thelma often went, braving its dangers with her native hardihood.

The waters of the creek looked purple black in the night shades, and its surface was unruffled by aught save the long, powerful, sweeping strokes of a fisherman pulling home. I was revelling in the solemn silence of the twilight, broken only by the dripping of the water from his oars, or the occasional tinkle of far-off sleigh bells, and thinking, as I scrambled from point to point, how easy it was to imagine that solitary boatman an ancient Viking, and to people the shores with the shades of the hardy heroes of the past, and the inlet with their long, low, war-dragons, painted and shield-hung ready for the sea, when a fresh sound fell upon my ears, and turning an angle in the cliff, I came face to face with a scene that sent a shiver through me and caused my heart, for a moment, to stand still with horror.

There, on the very verge of the frost-bound rock knelt my darling, her golden hair streaming over her shapely shoulders, and her white, dimpled hands locked together in supplication to a threatening form that towered before her. I took a step forward, and saw that it was Olaf, my rival, transformed by the culmination of his long-smouldering jealousy into a reckless, wild-eyed maniac.

His clenched hand was before Thelma's eyes, and it would need but one strong thrust, swiftly delivered, to send her headlong over the treacherous brink into the calm, cold waters far below. Shaded by the overhanging cliff, and unheard by them in their fearful situation, I crept softly nearer to the twain, fearing to betray my presence till I was close enough to act. However, I could hear what they were saying.

"Choose between us and here!" growled Olaf, shaking his knotted fingers at the frightened girl; "choose between your love for that cursed foreigner and a wedding with me."

"Have you no mercy?" pleaded Thelma, never taking her beseeching eyes from his face.

"None, as you have had none for my sufferings," hissed the madman, chafing under that earnest gaze. "You will marry me, or one touch of my hand sends you over here to seek Death for your bridegroom. Ha! ha! he will welcome you well, will that hoary old man, who has married so many; and a loving wife you will make him, lying cold and white under the salt water! Come, make up your mind, my trembling one."

He laughed horribly, and the sound echoed strangely from the stolid hills. I was within a few paces now, still unheard, unseen. Her eyes flashing with a sudden resolve, as one in the last strait, Thelma answered him: "How can I wed one who seeks my life? How can I forsake him whom I love? Yet, Olaf, let me go, if you have any heart in you."

He laughed again—a fierce, mocking laugh—drawing back his arm, and muttering: "Die, then, and see if he you love will come to you down there!" In a moment I had leaped to his side and pinioned him, holding him, writhing in my grasp, whilst I waited for Thelma to rise to her feet.

With a cry of joy and relief she sprang up, heedless of the insecure foothold, and the next thing I knew she had slipped and fallen, and was disappearing over the icy edge. I released Olaf instantly, and, springing towards her with frenzied impulse, caught her upthrown left hand in my right, and a jutting point of rock in my left, and hung there, supporting us both by that precarious hold. Her whole weight was upon my right arm, for the rock-face, that went sheer down a hundred yards or more to the fjord, was hard and smooth, giving no footing, whilst, tried as I was by the strain, I could not raise myself to firmer ground.

"Do not lose heart," I said to Thelma, looking down at the white, troubled face; "I will hang here as long as my muscles will hold together. Keep fast hold of me with both hands."

"Some boatman will surely see us, or hear our cries," said she, "before the darkness falls. But where is Olaf?"

Where? indeed. Even as she spoke I glanced up and met his evil gaze. He was standing over us, noting my position, exulting in the certainty of a mad revenge.

"I am not far away, sweetheart," he jeered, "not so far that I cannot bid you two farewell for ever, while your hands are clasped and your fates bound in one. Say, will you give me sweet Thelma for my wife, foreigner, or take her with you now?"

My heart sank, and I must own that in that fearful strait my nerve failed. Whose would not have done? My sinews were cracking under the terrible strain, and shadows spun round before my eyes. Yet I held on, endeavouring to temporise with my enemy, even promising him his wish.

With a madman's cunning, however, he saw my intention, shaking his head like a knowing child; and raising his foot, brought it down with sudden force upon the hand with which I grasped the little pinnacle of rock which alone kept us from destruction. The pain was keen—all the keener because of the cold—and I winced, but still held on.

A dog barked in the distance, and a fisherman below, hearing our cries and seeing our plight, was pulling for the shore with might and main. But the night was very near—already the sun was half hidden beyond the hills—and we were lost unless I could gain time.

"I cannot hold much longer," whispered Thelma faintly.

"Nor I," I answered. The stress was growing worse each second, and my fingers, numbed with the icy air, were gradually relaxing. Sudden as a flash of light a new thought struck me. "Grasp me round the waist, if you can," I said, "so I can get my right hand free."

In moments of peril we can do what at other times is impossible, and Thelma complied with my request, whilst I clutched the jutting crag with the disengaged hand.

But red-haired Olaf was not to be baulked of his fiendish purpose easily, and finding kicking of no avail to loosen my grip, calmly knelt down and drew his great knife from his pocket, opening it with malignant deliberation. I saw his object at a glance; the blood seemed to freeze in my veins from terror, and I nearly screamed aloud with fright. Down flashed the keen-edged blade upon my left hand, cutting a deep red gash across, though instinctively I drew it aside. Again it fell, and the hand, weakened by its previous work, hung limp and nerveless at my side.

I supported our united weight on my right arm alone now, and the joints and knuckles felt on fire with the awful tension. Only a little longer could I hold, when once more the cruel knife was raised to strike. I waited, catching my breath and gritting my teeth with despairing determination. Olaf held the weapon in air a moment, enjoying my distress—how long those seconds seemed—and then it fell, but not upon my hand.

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A bulky, shaggy form, with angry growl, rushed up the path out of the darkness, and, leaping on the would-be murderer, diverted his aim and sent him sprawling on his back within an inch of the precipice edge. He struggled, striking at the dog fiercely, but Wolf sprang aside, and missing his footing on the frosty brink, the wretched man reeled a moment, then fell down, down, into the black, deep waters. There was a faint splash, a little struggling, and all was still.

Then strong arms pulled me up until I could embrace the point of rock firmly, and the same arms raised Thelma to the level of the path.

Exhausted, weary, we lay there helpless, while the kindly fisherman chafed our numbed limbs and bound up my bleeding hand.

* * * * *

So we were saved, thanks to faithful Wolf and the boatman Bjorne, and when we went together that Christmas Eve into old Brun's halls all aglow with light and resonant with merrymaking, and told our tale, they cheered us till the rafters rang again, drinking to our health and happiness with boisterous applause, even the stern-faced host himself relenting and bidding me welcome in his house as a son.

What cared I, then, that in my black hair they found some threads of grey, and on my forehead removeless wrinkles? What care I now that my right arm is weak in the shoulder-joint, and cannot lift a heavy weight? The Flower of the Fjord is my own sweet blossom now, and I am amply paid for the agonies I underwent to gain her.

When the days lengthened and the nights crept in again, we wandered forth together as before, culling the early snowdrops and the lovely fifa-flowers, taking Wolf with us always, and stopping often to chat with staunch old Bjorne. The Wolmar fire burnt brightly at our betrothal, and when the midsummer festival came round again, it found us man and wife. I am staying in Trondhjem now, and when my darling asks if I do not long for my own land I can only say:

"*This* is my own land, now, my Thelma, for all that I love most is here, and I think there is no place so beautiful on all the earth."

And when I ask if she regrets that she has not married one of her own ruddy-haired countrymen, she says, her soft hand stealing into mine:

"There is no countryman I love like you, Dear Heart, so *why* should I regret?"

I have no answer to make to this, but we understand each other, and love's silences are more expressive than many words.

GEORGE C. WALLIS.

THE VENGEANCE OF PADRE ARROYO.

PILAR, from her little window just above the high wall surrounding the big house set apart for the women neophytes of the mission of Santa Ines, watched, morning and evening, for Andreo, as he came and went from the *rancheria*. The old women kept the girls busy spinning, weaving, sewing; but age nods, and youth is crafty.

The tall young Indian, who was renowned as the best huntsman of all the neophytes, and who supplied Padre Arroyo's table with deer and quail, never failed to keep his ardent eyes fixed upon the grating so long as it lay within the line of his vision. One day he went to Padre Arroyo and told him that Pilar was the prettiest girl behind the wall, and that she should be his wife. But the kind, stern old Padre shook his head.

"You are both too young; wait another year, my son, and if thou art still in the same mind thou shalt have her."

Andreo dared make no protest, but he asked permission to prepare a home for his bride. The Padre gave it willingly. At the end of a month he had built him a cabin among the willows of the *rancheria*, a little apart from the others. When the cabin was built his impatience slipped its curb, and he besought the priest to allow him to marry.

"Orion," said Padre Arroyo sternly—he called all his neophytes after the celebrities of earlier days—"have I not told thee thou must wait a year? Do not be impatient, my son; she will keep."

Andreo, dejected, left the Padre. As he passed Pilar's window, and saw a pair of wistful black eyes behind the grating, his heart took fire. No one was within sight. By a series of signs he made his lady understand that he would place a note beneath a certain hole in the wall.

Pilar, as she went to and fro under the fruit-trees in the garden, or sat in the long corridor weaving baskets, watched that hole with fascinated eyes. She knew that Andreo was tunnelling it, and one day his work was accomplished. But how to get the note? The old women's eyes were very sharp when the girls were in front of the grating! Then the civilising development of Christianity upon the heathen intellect triumphantly asserted itself. Pilar, too, conceived a brilliant scheme. That night the Padre, who encouraged any industry, no matter how eccentric, gave her a little garden of her own—a patch where she could raise sweet-peas and Castilian roses.

Pilar spent every spare hour bending over her "patch," and the hole, at first no bigger than a pin's head, was larger at each setting of the sun behind the mountain. The old women, scolding in the corridor, called to her not to forget vespers.

On the third evening, kneeling on the damp ground, she drew from the little tunnel a thin slip of wood,

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covered with the labour of sleepless nights. She hid it in her smock, then ran with shaking knees and prostrated herself before the altar. That night the moon streamed through her grating, and she deciphered the fact that Andreo had loosened eight "adobes"—the clay bricks—above her garden, and would await her every midnight.

Pilar sat up in bed and glanced about the room with terrified delight. It took her but a moment to decide the question; love had kept her awake too many nights. The neophytes were asleep; as they turned now and again, their narrow beds of hide, suspended from the ceiling, swung too gently to awaken them.

Pilar slipped from the bed and looked through the grating. Andreo was there. She waved her hand and pointed downwards to the wall. Then throwing on the long, coarse, grey smock that was her only garment, crept from the room and down the stair. As she crawled through the opening, Andreo took her hand bashfully, for they had never spoken.

"Come," he said, "we must be away before dawn."

They stole past the long Mission, crossing themselves as they glanced askance at the ghostly row of pillars; past the guard-house, where the sentries slept at their post; past the *rancheria*; then, springing upon a waiting mustang, dashed down the valley.

Glancing over Andreo's shoulder she watched the mass of brown and white buildings, the winding river, fade into the mountain. Then they began to ascend an almost perpendicular steep. The horse followed a narrow trail; the crowding trees and shrubs clutched the blanket and smock of the riders. After a time trail and scene grew white; the snow lay on the heights.

"Where do we go?" she asked.

"To Zaca Lake, on the very top of the mountain, miles above us. No one has ever been there but myself. Often I have shot deer and birds beside it. They will never find us there."

The sun rose over the mountains of the east; the crystal moon sank in the west. Andreo sprang from the weary mustang and carried Pilar to the lake.

A sheet of water, round as a whirlpool, but calm and silvern, lay amidst the sweeping willows and pine-forested peaks. The snow glittered beneath the trees, but a canoe was on the lake, a hut on the marge.

Padre Arroyo tramped up and down the corridor, smiting his hands together. The Indians bowed lower than usual as they passed, and hastened their steps. The soldiers scoured the country for the bold violaters of Mission Law. No one asked Padre Arroyo what he would do with the sinners, but all knew that punishment would be sharp and summary.

A week later, in the early morning, Padre Arroyo sat in the corridor. Suddenly he leant forward on his staff and lifted the heavy brown hood of his habit from his ear. Down the road, winding from the Eastern Mountains, came the echo of galloping footfalls.

He rose expectantly and waddled out upon the plaza, shading his eyes with his hand. A half-dozen soldiers, riding closely about a horse bestridden by a stalwart young Indian, supporting a woman, were rapidly approaching the Mission. The Padre returned to his seat and awaited their coming.

The soldiers escorted the culprits to the corridor; two held the horse while they descended, then led it away, and Andreo and Pilar were alone with the priest. The bridegroom placed his arm about the bride and looked defiantly at Padre Arroyo, but Pilar drew her long hair about her face and locked her hands together.

Padre Arroyo folded his arms and regarded them with lowered brows, a sneer on his mouth.

"I have new names for you both," he said, in his thickest voice. "Antony, I hope thou hast enjoyed thy honeymoon. Cleopatra, I hope thy little toes did not get frostbitten. You both look as if food had been scarce. And your garments have gone in good part to clothe the brambles, I fear. It is too bad you could not wait a year and move in your cabin at the *rancheria*, by a good fire, and with plenty of frijoles and tortillas in your stomachs."

He dropped his sarcastic tone, and rising to his feet, extended his right arm with a gesture of malediction. "Do you comprehend the enormity of your sin?" he shouted. "Have you not learned on your knees that the fires of Hell are the rewards of unlawful love? Do you not know that even the year of sackcloth and ashes I shall impose here on earth will not save you from those flames a million times hotter than the mountain fire, than the roaring pits in which evil Indians torture one another? A hundred years of their scorching breath, of roasting flesh, for a week of love."

Andreo looked somewhat staggered but unrepentant. Pilar burst into loud sobs of terror. The Padre stared long and gloomily at the flags of the corridor. Then he raised his head and looked sadly at his lost sheep.

"My children," he said solemnly, "my heart is wrung for you. You have broken the laws of God and of the Holy Catholic Church, and the punishments therein are awful. Can I do anything for you, excepting to pray? You shall have my prayers, my children. But that is not enough; I cannot—ay, I cannot endure the thought that you shall be damned. Perhaps—" again he stared meditatively at the stones; then, after an impressive silence, raised his eyes. "Heaven vouchsafes me an idea, my children. I will make your punishment here so bitter that Almighty God in His mercy will give you but a few years of purgatory after death. Come with me."

Pilar, almost fainting, shrank back as they reached the narrow, spiral stair which led downwards to the cells.

"Ay, I shall die, my Andreo," she cried. "Ay, my father, have mercy."

"I cannot, my children," said the Padre sadly. "It is for the salvation of your souls."

"Mother of God, when shall I see thee again, my Pilar?" answered Andreo. "But, ay, the memory of that week on the mountain will keep us both alive."

Padre Arroyo descended the stair and awaited them at the foot. Separating them, and taking each by the hand, he pushed Andreo ahead and dragged Pilar down the narrow passage.

At its end he took a great bunch of keys from his pocket, and, raising both hands, commanded them to kneel. He said a long prayer in a loud, monotonous voice which echoed and re-echoed down the dark hall, and made Pilar shriek with terror. Then he fairly hurled the marriage ceremony at them, and made the couple repeat after him the responses. When it was over, "Arise," he said. The poor things stumble to their feet, and Andreo caught Pilar in a last embrace.

"Now bear your incarceration with fortitude, my children; and if you do not beat the air with your groans I will let you out in a week. Do not hate your old father, for love alone makes him severe, but pray, pray, pray."

And then he locked them both in the same cell!

GERTRUDE ATHERTON.

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CHAPTER I.

"One evening I entered the smoking-room of my club, and saw a few friends of mine ensconced around the table in a distant corner. They were talking so seriously that they took no notice of my entrance.

"I do not think this sort of thing ought to be allowed," one of them was just saying as I joined the group. "It's nothing more or less than a disgrace to the society which tolerates it—which enjoys it, rather."

"My dear fellow," answered another of the party, "half the charm is in the danger. The risk that poor woman runs of killing herself is exactly what attracts hundreds of people there to see her. It's the very spice of the whole performance. Our civilisation is only skin deep—the barbarian is just beneath the surface. Old Rome had its gladiatorial shows—we in modern Europe find a faint excitement in watching men and women jeopardising their necks for the sake of a living."

"What in the world are you talking about?" I asked.

"About Julie," was the reply. "You haven't seen her? Then, my dear fellow you ought to do so—she's really worth it. The way in which she twists and throws herself about on the trapeze swung right up among the rafters of the building is enough to make one turn cold all over. It's fearful. She must have a nerve of iron, though she is such a slight and delicate-looking thing." The speaker pulled out his watch at this point. "Look here," he continued, "Julie doesn't come on till ten o'clock or after. There's plenty of time. Let's all go together and see her."

I held out for a minute or two, for I never much cared for performances of that kind. But all the rest seemed anxious to go, and not wishing to appear unsociable, I at length yielded, and agreed to make one of the party.

I do not think that I shall ever forget the appearance of Mademoiselle Julie as she walked on to the stage that night and stood kissing her hand to the excited crowd with which the hall was filled. She was a woman of delicate and almost fragile build. I had expected to see a woman of masculine type, coarse in development, and vulgar in manner. But Julie was nothing of the kind. There was something so charmingly modest and retiring about her—something so simple and innocent—that it was only by an effort that one could persuade oneself that the figure upon the stage was really the famous acrobat of whose daring feats there had been so much talk

Indeed, for the moment all thought of the coming performance was lost in silent admiration of the beautiful picture which was thus presented to the gaze. A kind of thrill went through the expectant crowd, and a perceptible hush fell upon the people before their pent-up feelings could find vent in a wild outburst of applause. And no wonder. A more perfectly lovely woman than Julie it has never been my lot to behold.

There was something dazzling—something intoxicating in her beauty.

As you looked at her you lost for the time being all remembrance of her profession. You thought only of the perfect features; the clear, lustrous eyes; the light, supple form; the unconscious grace of every attitude and movement. It was only with a shock that you suddenly woke up to the recollection that after all Julie was only a circus-woman, a performer of athletic feats, whose life, could the truth about it only be known, would probably turn out to be one of misery and poverty, and, most likely, of degradation.

But no thought of what Julie might be behind those mysterious scenes came now to break the spell of fascination which held the crowd breathless and still. Every eye was intent to follow her as she carelessly sprang forward and caught the bar, which had been let down almost to a level with the stage. Then, holding easily to this, she was carried aloft, up—up—over the heads of the people, up, beyond the gas jets; up, till she reached the trapeze which had been swung for her among the very rafters of that lofty building. One light spring from bar to bar, and there she was, supported only by her hands at that dizzy height, and gazing down, with the same strange, daring, unreal smile, at the sea of wondering, upturned faces a hundred feet beneath.

No wonder that we held our breath, and that some even turned away, afraid to watch her. It seemed at times as though she were bound to fall. The giddy recklessness with which she flung herself out into space, and caught the bar again as though it were only by accident that she did so; her sudden whirls and unexpected gyrations, the constant succession of difficult feats, performed so rapidly that the eye could hardly follow her movements, made the brain reel, and almost caused the heart to stand still in its pulsations.

How those about me behaved I do not know, but I sat like one entranced, with eyes that refused to quit the slight woman's form yonder above me, and a hollow

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feeling of sickness within, which I should attempt in vain to describe.

At length the spell was broken. Amid the deafening plaudits of the spectators, Julie descended and stood once more upon the stage, with cheeks flushed by her exertions, but otherwise apparently unmoved by the performance which she had just gone through. While she was being recalled again and again, returning to bow her acknowledgments with the same old unreal smile, I became aware of two men standing at my side whom I had not observed before.

One was a stout, dark, vulgar-looking fellow, seedily dressed and smelling strongly of stale tobacco; the other was tall, handsome in a sense, with two diamond rings on his fingers and a diamond pin of enormous dimensions at his breast. Judging from the expressions on their faces, they had been observing the recent exhibition with the coolness of professional men.

"She'll do," said the vulgar man, nodding approvingly.

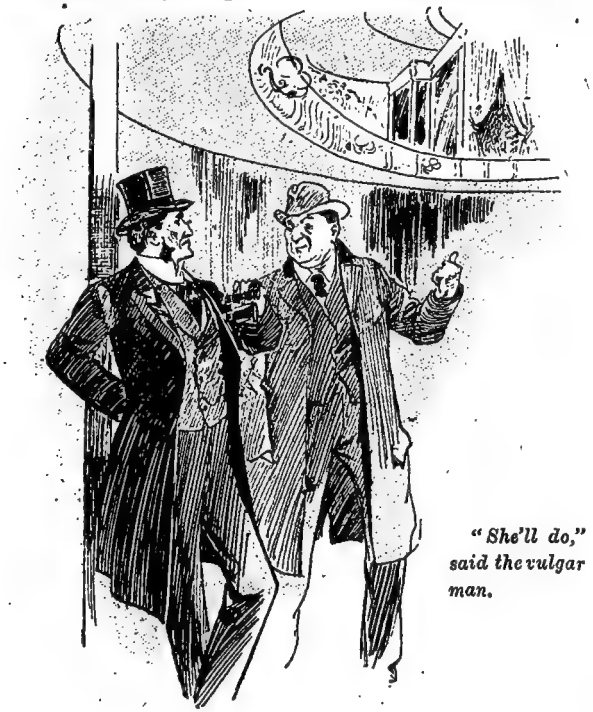
"Yes," answered his bediamonded companion, "she'll do right enough, if you only get her in time. Of course she'll kill herself sooner or later, so you must get her as early as possible."

"She's got another six weeks to run here," the other said.

"That's bad," was the reply. "I don't know how long she's been at it, but the chances of her breaking her neck before another six weeks are out are enormous. A pretty penny she's been in Bowder's pocket, to be sure."

I turned away sickened. These were the proprietors or managers of some other place of amusement, I supposed. But I could no longer listen to such conversation.

On the way home we talked of nothing but Julie. We had all been strangely fascinated by her wonderful beauty, and concurred in pronouncing her performance the most daring thing of the kind we had ever seen.



"She'll do," said the vulgar man.

"It'll be another version of the old story of the pitcher and the fountain, I am afraid," said one of us; "Julie may go through that kind of thing for a thousand nights, but she's almost certain to meet with an accident at last. One mistake does it, you see. The misjudgment of the hundredth part of a second or of an inch, and it's all over with her."

"And she does not seem to have a twinge of fear," I said.

"Certainly not; that would prove fatal. All such feats as hers must be done in cold blood, or they cannot be done at all. The slightest nervousness, hesitation, self-doubt, would destroy that perfect rhythm of nerve and muscle which alone makes them possible.

Just before we parted that night a sudden thought struck me.

"Did you notice——" I began; but I interrupted myself with a laugh and a contemptuous, "After all, 'twas nothing."

"Notice what?" chimed my companions in a chorus.

"Well, did you notice," I said, "the peculiar searching glance that Julie cast round the house the moment she got on to the stage?"

Strangely enough, every one had noticed it.

"It was exactly as if she were looking for someone," I remarked.

And everyone agreed that it was so.

CHAPTER II.

MADEMOISELLE JULIE'S performance had taken more effect upon me than I realised that same night. I went to bed, supposing that by the morning I should have forgotten all about her, but in this I was entirely mistaken. The recollection of her slight girlish figure and strangely beautiful face haunted me for days, and before the week was out I was impelled by a force I could not understand, and did not stop to analyse, to go and see her again.

I went, not only once, but four or five times. I did not enjoy watching her; her wild daring turned me cold and sick, and I breathed a sigh of relief when she once more descended to the stage. Still, I did not seem to be able to keep away from the place. The charm of that woman's presence was too strong, when combined with the morbid and sensational fascination of her exhibition; and again and again I found myself in the heated and unwholesome atmosphere of that crowded hall. I learnt afterwards from others that their experiences had been similar to my own.

It was at this time that, for the most part, I became acquainted with Julie's history. Little by little, setting with the utmost care the purely mythological from the genuine elements in the thousand stories which went the round about her, I succeeded in piecing together a kind of hypothetical biography which threw a good deal of light on her present character and conduct. After the occurrence of the incident, which I shall presently narrate, I was able to fill up the gaps in my history and to find the complete explanation of the woman's strange and wild career.

She was the child of circus performers. Her father was a clown, her mother an equestrian lady. From her very earliest days Julie had been before the public. Even as a child she had attracted a good deal of attention by her daring and natural grace; and as she ripened into girlhood, and developed the marvellous and resistless fascination of which I have spoken, she came to be in ever increasing request. She travelled with

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her parents all over Europe, as well as in the United States; and everywhere she went she met with the most astonishing success. During all this time, however, she had habitually performed with the protection of a net.

Two years before her sudden advent in London, Julie was fulfilling an engagement in Paris, when, as frequently happened, a young man who had seen her again and again, besought an introduction. More persistent or more fortunate than the tribes of suitors who everywhere followed her steps, young Zyll—for such was his name—at length found his way into her presence. He was madly, passionately in love with her, he said. In her alone now rested the whole happiness of his life. Would she—could she—refuse him when he came to throw his life and his possessions at her feet?

I know not how long Zyll urged his suit, but at length Julie lent him a willing ear. Handsome, elegant, attractive, he possessed every gift likely to prove availing with a girl of Julie's warm and highly-strung temperament. She returned his love with all the ardour of her nature, and presently forsook the circus-ring at his request.

Months went by, when the shadow fell, and the tragedy of Julie's life began. Her lover tired of her—his passing passion was satisfied; and do what she would, she could not succeed in regaining his wandering affections. One day he made a journey to Paris, on business—purely on business; and he never returned. Hopeless and broken-hearted, Julie went back to her old life, only retaining his name as the one fond memento of her short, sweet dream of bliss.

She went back to her old life, but not in the old way. Everything that made existence bright to her belonged to the past, and with nothing to live for, nothing to hope for, nothing to care for, she grew reckless of life.

Danger went for nothing with her now. Feats at which she would have shuddered a year ago seemed easy and simple in her present state of heedless, thoughtless daring. Bold and venturesome as she always had been, she was a hundredfold more bold and venturesome than ever now.

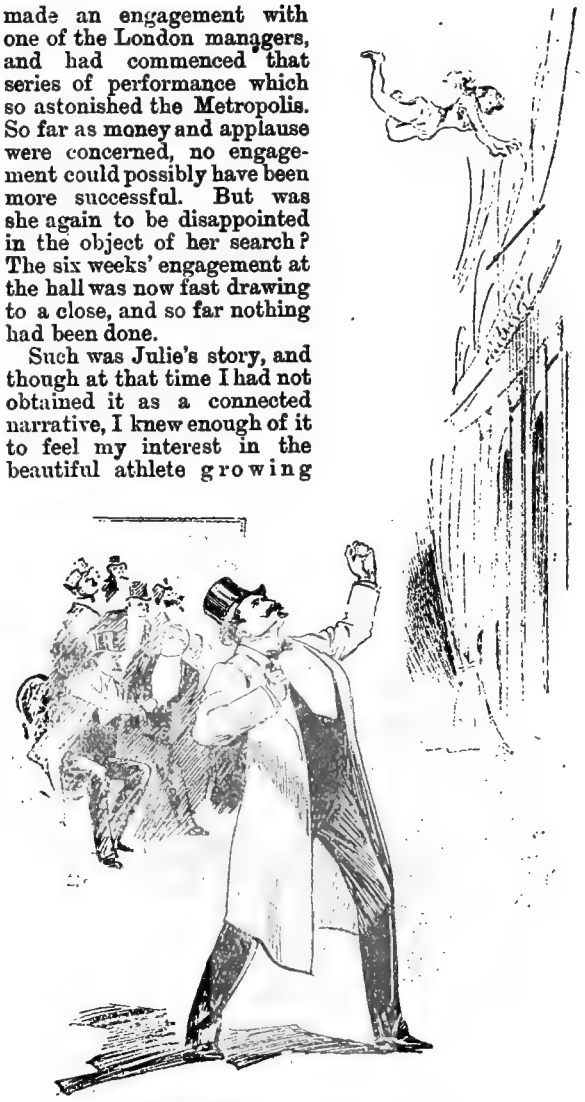
She seemed to have lost every sensation of fear—to have forgotten what the word danger meant. When those about her remonstrated and warned, she only laughed her light, silvery laugh. "*Ce n'est rien—rien—rien,*" she said carelessly, and that was all they ever got out of her.

I have said that she had nothing left to live for; but that is not quite correct. She still kept one object before her—the rediscovery of her lost and faithless lover. The search was a wild one, the chances that its end would ever be attained seemed, indeed, extremely remote. But Julie, keeping her intentions to herself, went from city to city and from country to country, trusting ever that one day she might find some traces of Zyll, and in spite of a thousand disappointments, hopeful still that ultimately she might meet with success.

"It is not as if I were a woman of private life," she would say to herself; "wherever I go my name becomes known. One day he will hear it mentioned, and if it is only out of curiosity he will come and see me. Then, when he knows what danger I run in every performance, his heart may be touched once again, and he may find that still he loves me too well to let me break my neck. *Allons.* I must find him sooner or later. Do not let us be cast down."

Nearly a year after her return to public life, Mdlle. Julie, as she was professionally called, heard accidentally that Zyll was in England. Before long she had made an engagement with one of the London managers, and had commenced that series of performance which so astonished the Metropolis. So far as money and applause were concerned, no engagement could possibly have been more successful. But was she again to be disappointed in the object of her search? The six weeks' engagement at the hall was now fast drawing to a close, and so far nothing had been done.

Such was Julie's story, and though at that time I had not obtained it as a connected narrative, I knew enough of it to feel my interest in the beautiful athlete growing more keen than ever. I had become quite a constant patron of Bowder's entertainment, and, by dint of continually watching the performance, had by this time grown sufficiently accustomed to its danger to be able to take my place among the crowd without those feelings of sickness and horror which I had at first experienced.



"Julie! Julie! descend! descend!"

CHAPTER III.

AT length the last night of Julie's engagement in London had come. All the necessary arrangements were made, and she was to start the first thing the next morning for Liverpool, where she was to perform until Christmas. I had made up my mind to see her for the last time before her departure, and started off quite early in the evening, knowing that on such an occasion the number of spectators would be very great.

I was not deceived. When I reached the hall the entrances were already blocked by large crowds, waiting

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for the opening of the doors. Evidently it was to be quite a gala night. However, not caring to take my chance in such a multitude, I quietly walked round to the manager of the Hall's hotel, close at hand, and got him to give me an order which I knew would admit me to a good seat, even after the doors were thrown open. Expecting that I was to meet one of my friends there that evening, I made him write the order for two, and then strolled off to look for my friend, feeling secure as to my own place.

I waited half an hour after the appointed time, and as he did not appear I determined to give him up and enter at once. But just as I was about to pass in at the door my attention was attracted by the figure of a man, who was engaged almost at my side in studying the programme bill with the most extraordinary interest.

He was a tall and very handsome man, faultlessly dressed, with the manner and appearance of a gentleman, and probably about thirty years of age. As I stood for a moment looking at him with some curiosity, he turned abruptly on his heel, with a very excited movement, and, catching sight of me, touched his hat. This action confirmed me in the already formed opinion that he was a foreigner.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, speaking rapidly and with ill-concealed emotion, "excuse me, sir, but are you going in there?"

I announced that such was my intention.

"Can you tell me," he continued, with the same tone and manner, "if there is anything there worth seeing?"

"Certainly," I replied. "they give a very good entertainment."

"H'm." He paused for a moment as if he were hesitating as to whether he should proceed. "And—and this Mademoiselle Julie, is her performance good? I am a Frenchman and a stranger in London," he added, by way of an explanation.

I told him that it was Julie more than anyone else who was just then filling the house night after night.

"And what is she like?" he asked quickly, looking straight into my face with his keen grey eyes.

"There is her photograph." I answered, pointing to a frame which stood just inside the door.

I watched him approach the frame and stagger back as he caught sight of Julie's face. I touched his arm, and, as he turned in response I saw that his face was ghastly pale.

"I—I must go in and see her," he said, passing his hand nervously across his brow.

"The house is very full now," I said, "and you will have great difficulty in finding even standing room. But see, I have a ticket which will admit two. If you will come with me I shall be pleased."

He stammered out some hardly comprehensible words of thanks, and we went in together. The house was indeed crammed, but there was still the open space kept clear as usual beneath the trapeze.

At length ten o'clock came. A kind of buzz of anticipation ran through the expectant crowd; the orchestra gave one loud, long-drawn chord, and Julie appeared, brighter, more beautiful, more goddess-like than ever. The man at my side gave a bound upon his seat, and an exclamation which happily was drowned in the deafening cheers with which Julie was welcomed.

I saw the dark, lustrous eyes wander as usual over the upturned faces, but though they appeared for a moment to rest on the very spot where we were sitting, they evidently saw us not. But, none the less, they seemed to have a strange effect upon my companion, who sat white and trembling, his starting eyes fixed upon the athlete with an intensity of meaning and despair which I shall never, never forget. "*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" I heard him mutter beneath his breath, and instinctively I seized his arm. His hand touched mine as I did so. It was deadly cold, and the fingers were closed in a convulsive grasp.

And lay, a mangled, quivering mass at her lover's feet.

With the same old careless smile, which, as I knew so well now, was only assumed, Julie sprang forward and caught the bar; and then, once more, up she went, above the orchestra, above the gas-lamps, up, up in the very roof of the building. There she hung again upon that fragile support, gazing down from the dizzy height, swinging idly, carelessly, until, with a mad impulse, she threw herself over, and with a sudden turn of the body, sat lightly upon her terrible seat.

Never had she seemed more daring and more reckless than on that fearful evening. The vast crowd of spectators seemed with one accord to hold their breaths.

"*Mon Dieu!* It is terrible!" cried the man at my side, suddenly giving vent to his pent-up emotion; before I could do anything to hold him back, before even I could realise what he was about, he had disengaged himself from my grasp, and had sprung forward into the open space directly beneath the trapeze.

"Julie! Julie!" he cried hoarsely, "descend! descend! It is I—François! For the love of Heaven come down!"

The orchestra paused as he spoke — a death-like silence fell upon that horror-stricken crowd. Paralysed, no one moved. But the voice, the well-known, the long-lost, the still-beloved voice, had reached the dizzy height where Julie hung. It was too much. A faint scream from above, echoed by one fearful heart-rending shriek from below, and then Julie fell straight, like an arrow, into the open space beneath her, and lay, a mangled, quivering mass at her lover's feet.

HAROLD DEWHURST.

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The Pilot's Story.

Only once during the whole of his long career as a pilot had old Jean Strabbe been afraid; and that circumstance was no reflection on his courage, but was born of the superstitions which seem to be a part of the nature of those rough men of the coast. This incident in his life was connected with his own domestic affairs; the story, as told to me, was full of interest.

Ten years ago, the family consisted of Jean Strabbe, his daughter Jeannic and three sons; the mother was dead. Jeannic was nineteen, and three boys twenty-one, twenty-three, and twenty-five respectively. One day Jean was surprised by a visit from Yvon le Gonic, the Captain of a coasting vessel, who, without beating about the bush, asked for the hand of his daughter. Jean scouted the idea; Yvon was twelve years older than his daughter and had the reputation of being a brutal, drunken, low-minded fellow. To give his daughter to such a man, was (in his opinion) to make her miserable for life. But—as the old man said quaintly—he had reckoned without Jeannic. She had made up her mind to marry Yvon; she was sure that she could reclaim him, and she would be his wife come what might.

There was no help for it; so the marriage took place in due course and the two lived in a cottage at the other end of the village.

Yvon le Gonic seemed to have become a changed man; he did not frequent the inn when on shore, as he had hitherto done; he became cleaner in his habits, more respectable in appearance and manners; and he treated his wife, of whom he was seemingly very fond, with every consideration. In short, after nearly a year, Strabbe and his sons began to entertain kindlier and better feelings towards him, and to regret that they had thought so ill of him.

But alas! it was soon over. One day they learnt almost at the same minute that Yvon had either given up or lost his position, and that he and his wife had left the village. Left the village! Jeannic gone, and without a word to her poor distracted father as to their destination!

It was a terrible blow to the old pilot, as well as the boys, for in their rough way they were devoted to their sister. They made inquiries about the fugitives, but without success; and as months went by without news they felt that she was lost to them. Not until two years later did they hear from Jeannic, and then Strabbe received a letter containing three words only: "Come to me." It was signed "Jeannic," and the postmark was that of a small town many miles away.

Strabbe and his boys immediately responded to the call, and that same day they stood by the side of the dying woman. She was just conscious of their presence, and smiled like a happy child. Before sunset she was dead.

From the priest who had attended to her wants at the last Jean gleaned a few details. Soon after settling in the town Yvon had fallen back into his old ways. He had shamefully ill-treated his wife, and, in fact, had behaved just as the old pilot had feared when he first refused to agree to the marriage. Jeannic had died from privation, accelerated by injuries inflicted a few days previously by Yvon in a drunken fit. Yvon had fled, nobody knew whither.

Why had his daughter not written to him? Pride probably had prevented her. So poor Jeannic was buried amid the sobs of the four rough fellows, who returned next day to their home in Penmarch full of vengeful feelings towards Yvon le Gonic.

Three years passed away. Nothing had been heard of Yvon le Gonic at Penmarch.

It was the afternoon of an August day in 1892. Jean and his "boys" sat in the old weather-beaten cottage smoking their pipes and listening to the howling of the storm. A dreadful gale had been blowing since the morning; the sea was dashing furiously upon the rocky coast and around Penmarch Point—such a sea as few would care to be out in, and certainly no Captain in his senses would have deliberately risked his vessel by trying to round the Point in such weather. So the four men had settled themselves down to as quiet a day as possible.

A heavy bang at the door made them all start to their feet. The youngest son opened the door and found himself face to face with a gentlemanly man enveloped in a mackintosh.

"I want Jean Strabbe, the pilot," he said. "Phew! Let me come in out of this!"

The young man stood aside and allowed the stranger to enter.

"Are you Jean Strabbe?" he inquired of the old man, after hastily scrutinising the four.

"I am," replied Strabbe. "But you are wet——"

"No matter," exclaimed the new-comer hurriedly. "See here. I am the agent of Messrs. Duval, of Concarneau. We have a brig off this coast which will inevitably be lost unless she rounds the Point. To do that we want a pilot—a pilot with nerve, for no half-hearted pilot can save the vessel in such a sea as this. The cap-

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tain must have been mad not to have run into J—— and waited. His instructions were to lose no time, but the fool was not told to risk the vessel in this manner. Well, it amounts to this, if that vessel is lost we shall never get the insurance money under the circumstances, and we shall lose immense business by failing to execute this order to time—because if the cargo is lost we cannot carry out the order under a month. So we want a pilot to go out to the vessel, which is beating about out there making signals for a pilot just as though the sea were as smooth as glass—the madman!—and take her round the Point to F——, and we will give ten thousand francs for the job. I am told that you are the only man who is dare-devil enough to undertake the task. Will you do it?"

The agent stopped, quite out of breath with hurried talking and anxiety, and looked at Jean.

"What vessel is it?" asked Strabbe absently, for he was really thinking of the possibility of doing what was required.

"The *Marie*, Captain, Yvon le Gonic," replied the Agent, repeating the formula mechanically.

A cry broke from the lips of the four men simultaneously. "Curse him!" exclaimed Jean through his clenched teeth.

The Agent looked from one to another in bewilderment. "What is it?" he asked.

The old pilot was the first to recover his composure.

"Yvon le Gonic is the greatest rascal on this earth!" he cried vehemently. "Any ship commanded by him is doomed. God is taking vengeance on him for his villainy, and I cannot go out to help him, for that would bring down Heaven's wrath upon me also."

"What nonsense is this?" asked the Agent angrily.

"It is no nonsense," replied Jean solemnly; "I can't do it."

"Yvon ought to know this coast," said the youngest son.

"He doesn't. He wasn't a pilot, and he didn't come this way often."

"If he did know the coast he couldn't save the ship. He is doomed!" exclaimed Strabbe.

"Well," sighed the Agent, "I have done what I could. We can get over the loss of the boat and the business, and perhaps the captain deserves to drown, but I'm sorry for the others. Twelve of them to drown because the captain is a rascal! Poor fellows!"

Jean started; he had forgotten the crew. His face assumed a troubled look. What was he to do? On the one hand, he firmly believed that what he had said was true; but, on the other hand, ought he to allow the twelve men—all with wives and children, maybe—to drown without doing what he could to save them? His superstitious fears made him tremble to undertake this job, and his honest, manly feelings bade him try.

"I will try it!" he exclaimed. "But," (under his breath) "I know I cannot do it. It is God's will."

"I will pay——" began the Agent.

"No!" interrupted the pilot. "I want no money for trying to save my fellow man. Come, boys," turning to his sons, "just a drop of cognac, and out with the boat."

Thirty minutes later they were pulling hard towards the vessel, which was struggling with the waves and lying to as much as possible to avoid the rocks. It was fearfully hard work to pull the boat even for such muscular fellows as the Strabbes, but they bent to the oars with all their might, and made fair headway. Old Jean Strabbe was terribly upset; his nervousness increased as they slowly neared the vessel, and it became evident to his sons that unless he regained possession of himself, he could never accomplish the task of piloting the vessel round the Point. They themselves were not pilots; they were fishermen.

At last, after two hours' hard work and many narrow escapes of being capsized, they reached the *Marie*. A rope was thrown to them, and five minutes later they were on board and their boat hauled up.

With ashen-grey face, Jean Strabbe looked about him with a bewildered air. His superstitious fears, strange as it may seem to us, were rapidly mastering him and rendering him totally unfit for his work.

"Are you a pilot—can you get us out of this fix?" asked a well-known voice gruffly. Jean turned and found himself confronting Yvon le Gonic.

"Yes, Yvon le Gonic! So we meet at last, you villain!"

The Captain uttered a fearful oath as he recognised the father of the woman he had hurried to her death. Forgetting himself for the moment, he let go his hold and stepped forward with uplifted hand to strike the old man; but even as he made the movement a heavy sea caught the ship and made her heel over. Yvon lurched sideways and fell, and before he could recover himself another wave swept over the deck. When it was gone, the Captain had disappeared.

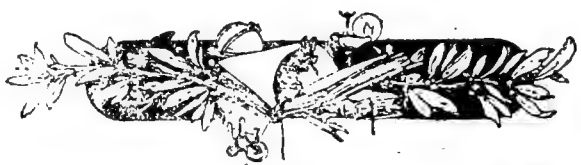
Nothing could be done to save him. Two of the men watched for any trace of him, while the others continued their work on the vessel. A complete change came over Jean with the disappearance of Yvon.

"Heaven has avenged my little Jeannie," he murmured, "and Heaven will now save the crew." His composure returned, and, as though to prove the truth of his remark, the sea became just a little calmer, and the prospect of saving the vessel correspondingly brighter.

Jean's anxiety seemed to vanish entirely now; he had confidence in his own ability, and he believed that the death of Yvon was the sacrifice required by an outraged Providence. He issued his orders calmly, orders which were willingly obeyed by all, including his sons, and the vessel was slowly, but safely, conducted round the Point into port.

And that is the story, for it only remains to be added that the owners insisted—in spite of Jean's remonstrances—in paying over the ten thousand francs which had been offered by their representative.

Geo. Day.



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The Survival of the Fittest.

DRAGGING itself westward across the dreary plains of Utah, the overland train, from a vantage point in the sky, looked like a small horsehair snake crawling over the earth's surface. The earth—almost the air—was white with the heat of the summer sun. All was vastness, immensity, silence, loneliness; above, the flawless blue; below, those seemingly illimitable plains of reddish yellow, streaked with alkali white, that swam back and forth below the eyes in parallel lines, until far off they melted into a low, long stretch of shivering light, the mocking water mirage at the base of the mountain ranges hundreds of miles away. Encompassed by that horizon there was nothing of life except within that desultory moving train.

Packed in the emigrant, or third-class, car of the train was a crowd of tired, miserable, and dirty people. They looked out listlessly at the passing landscape, or stupidly at each other, or twisted themselves into all sorts of uncomfortable positions on the hard wooden seats in vain efforts to secure a little sleep.

Perhaps the most unprepossessing of them all was a dark-featured, roughly-dressed man. Beside him was a very little girl in a blue dress. His lowering, repellent face had a scowl upon it which suggested the convict or the desperado; but he was neither. The scowl and the unconscious sneer about his ugly mouth were born simply of a long and thoroughly fruitless struggle with misfortune.

Although pretty, it was easy to see that the little girl was his child. She was the solitary ray of sunshine in that railway steerage. Even the dull faces of the people in the carriage took on an expression of tenderness when they looked at her, for she had cheered them during the last three weary days with her joyous laughter and merry play. Just now she was lying asleep on the breast of the ill-favoured-looking man, one chubby hand pressed against his rough, unshaven cheek. It was unnecessary to ask if the child had a mother.

She was a momentous factor in a mighty problem to the man whose arm was about her, and whose knit brows and troubled face showed me how hard it was he studied it. A crazy letter had come to him across the Continent, and he had left the tenements of New York to try and reach the golden land of California. He had started with hardly sufficient money to take himself and child more than half the distance, but he had a confused sort of an idea that he would in some way reach his destination. Better it was, at all events, than to remain in the noisome Hester Street den, where, without work or the prospect of any, his little sum of money would soon be gone.

The station to which his scanty purse had enabled him to buy a ticket for himself and child had been passed hours before, and he was wondering how soon the conductor of the train would discover the shameless imposition he was practising upon the railway company. He had not much longer to wait, for presently the autocrat of the train, in a hurried passage through the carriage, stopped suddenly before him and asked for his ticket.

"Hello, where are you going?"

The man looked up in what was intended as a humble, respectful, and piteous appeal, but his lip curled up over his teeth like that of a harried dog. He could not help it. His voice was mild enough, as he said:

"I am going to California, sir, with my little girl."

The man's looks seems to irritate the not too even temper of the railway official.

"You are, eh? Well, where's your ticket for the rest of the way?"

"If you would please let me go through the train with my little girl," replied the unfortunate one falteringly, "I think I could raise the money."

The baby girl was now wide awake, her big, round, dark eyes fixed wonderingly upon the conductor.

"Go through the train? Not much. Third-class

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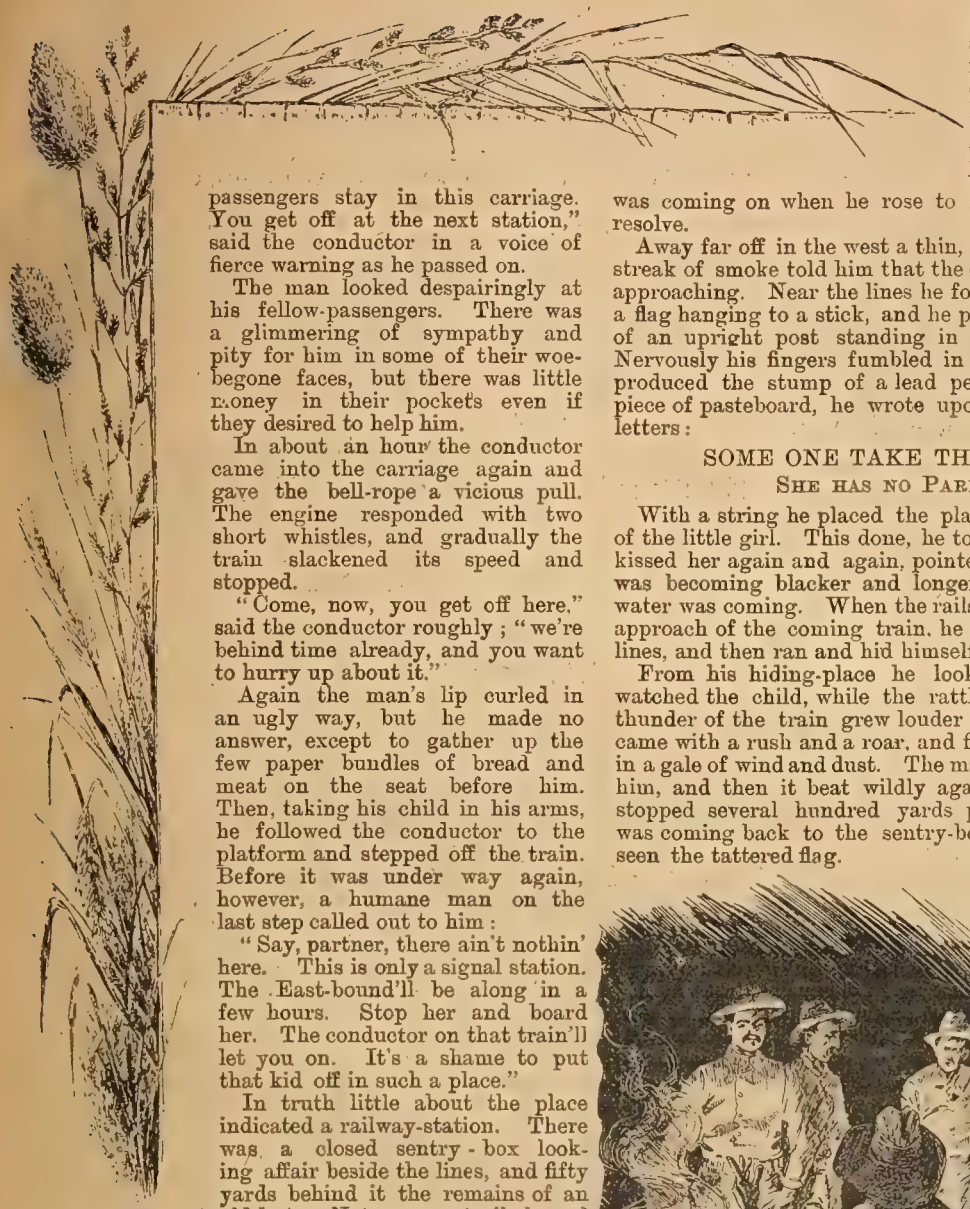


passengers stay in this carriage. You get off at the next station," said the conductor in a voice of fierce warning as he passed on.

The man looked despairingly at his fellow-passengers. There was a glimmering of sympathy and pity for him in some of their woe-begone faces, but there was little money in their pockets even if they desired to help him.

In about an hour the conductor came into the carriage again and gave the bell-rope a vicious pull. The engine responded with two short whistles, and gradually the train slackened its speed and stopped.

"Come, now, you get off here," said the conductor roughly; "we're behind time already, and you want to hurry up about it."

Again the man's lip curled in an ugly way, but he made no answer, except to gather up the few paper bundles of bread and meat on the seat before him. Then, taking his child in his arms, he followed the conductor to the platform and stepped off the train. Before it was under way again, however, a humane man on the last step called out to him:

"Say, partner, there ain't nothin' here. This is only a signal station. The East-bound'll be along in a few hours. Stop her and board her. The conductor on that train'll let you on. It's a shame to put that kid off in such a place."

In truth little about the place indicated a railway-station. There was a closed sentry-box looking affair beside the lines, and fifty yards behind it the remains of an old hut. Not even a trail showed where it was that any human being had visited the spot. And around was the dreary waste of billowy plains and the burning sun overhead.

In the rear of the signal-box its projecting roof had cast a little shade, and here the man sat down upon the ground with his child still in his arms. Strange things, for him, came into his eyes—tears. The little one looked up at him in a puzzled way, and he hastily brushed his hand across his face, and left a broad smudge of railway soot upon his cheek. She clapped her hands, and laughed with glee at his funny face.

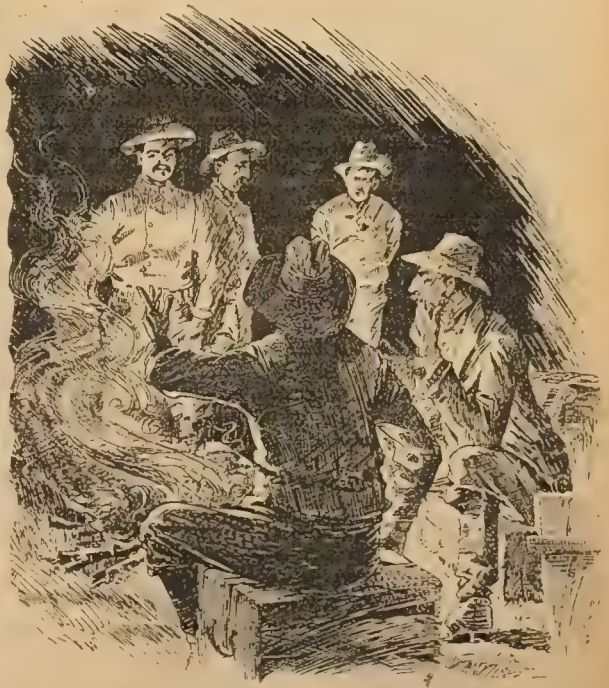
Then thirst came to them—that awful, torturing, unreasoning thirst which the desert alone can give. The child cried for water, and the father left her in the scanty shade and stepped out into the glaring sun. Neither in the sky nor in the parched ground was there a drop of moisture, and he knew it. He returned and tried to comfort her, and then he sat down again, buried his face in his hands, and tried to think. The evening was coming on when he rose to his feet with a new resolve.

Away far off in the west a thin, almost imperceptible, streak of smoke told him that the east-bound train was approaching. Near the lines he found a dirty shred of a flag hanging to a stick, and he placed it in the socket of an upright post standing in front of the house. Nervously his fingers fumbled in his pockets until he produced the stump of a lead pencil. Picking up a piece of pasteboard, he wrote upon it, in great, rough letters:

SOME ONE TAKE THIS CHILD!
SHE HAS NO PARENTS.

With a string he placed the placard round the neck of the little girl. This done, he took her in his arms, kissed her again and again, pointed to the smoke that was becoming blacker and longer, and told her that water was coming. When the rails began to sing of the approach of the coming train, he placed her near the lines, and then ran and hid himself in the hut.

From his hiding-place he looked out and eagerly watched the child, while the rattle and clamour and thunder of the train grew louder in his ears. On it came with a rush and a roar, and flew past the station in a gale of wind and dust. The man's heart died within him, and then it beat wildly again. The train had stopped several hundred yards past the station and was coming back to the sentry-box. The driver had seen the tattered flag.



Sitting by the camp fire.

As the long train rolled slowly backward, curious and inquiring heads protruded from the windows. The gold-emblazoned conductor stepped off and looked about him in wonder. Not for several moments did he discover the child. Immediately there was a crowd about it, and the placard was passed from hand to hand. A white-jacketed porter came out of a Pullman car and placed a wooden step on the ground before it. He was followed by a lady in black, who descended from the carriage and joined the throng.

A pair of eager, yearning, beseeching eyes watched it all from the hut. To the man in hiding it seemed that the determination of his child's fate never would be reached. Finally he saw the lady in black take the child in her arms, kiss it, and re-enter the carriage. The passengers scrambled back, the conductor waved his hand, and the train moved on.

Then the father came forth and gazed longingly at the departing train—gazed at it until it became smaller and smaller—until it became a dot in the plains—until it vanished—and he knew he was alone.

He stretched himself on the baked ground that night to sleep, but could not. Two little stars in the firmament—modest little stars very near together—reminded him of the eyes of his child, and he tried to fix his thoughts on them and of her, but it was in vain—he could not forget his thirst.

The terrible sun rose the next day and looked down upon him as its victim. He endeavoured to eat some of the bread he had saved, but the dry crumbs were torture to his throat. One thing only was there to do—to follow the lines until an inhabited station was reached. It might be fifty miles—it might be more—but there was no salvation away from the railway.

He started off bravely enough, his longing eyes fixed on the ever receding point where the glistening rails met in the far perspective. But sometimes his gaze wandered even further on to where it surely seemed that blue-green trees were bathing their feet in cool waters.

At noon, when resting for a while, he heard the rattle of an approaching goods train. Hope welled up within him, and he fondly imagined himself sitting by the camp fire at the diggings listening to the oft-repeated tales of the fabulous fortunes to be made in these parts. He stood on the metals and made frantic motions to stop the train. The men merely laughed at him. He did not know he had employed the favourite ruse of tramps. Goods trains were not for the accommodation of such gentry. Nor was it a supposable case that a wayfarer in the desert was unprovided with food or drink, else why should he be there?

After this his progress was very slow. On the third day he came to the end of his journey. He may have been delirious, or he may have been quite sane. A train stopped for him and took him on board. This they always do when they kill a man.

William A. Taaffe.

RESULT OF THE PUZZLE PICTURE COMPETITION

ANNOUNCED IN THE

Double Christmas Number of "SHORT STORIES."

The first correct solution to hand was forwarded by Robert W. Healey, 19, Clarendon Road, Middlesbrough, Yorks. Mr. Healey therefore wins the £10 prize which was offered. The following competitors have since solved the puzzle correctly. I have been very pleased to forward a bound volume of the first series of *Footlight Favourites* (value 7s. 6d.) to each of them as a memento of the contest: E. Bovell, Prestwood, Great Missenden, Bucks; H. S. Uhlrich, Bryntirion, Chelsfield, Kent; J. Hessell, 5, Dean Street, South Shore, Blackpool; Mr. Henderson, 2, Foothfield Terrace, Templeogue, Dublin; T. Whatson Lewis, Oswald Road, Oswestry, Salop; Maurice Mungall, 9, Ruthven Street, Hillhead, Glasgow; Albert Vigor, The Stores, Hurstpierpoint, Sussex; Miss Bertie Perrett, 4, The Cedars, Clapham Common, S.W.; H. C. Latimer, Pine Road, Winton, Bournemouth.

The "key" of the original picture is reproduced below:

30	73	34	91	6	66	46	14	78
19	71	37	54	26	84	35	7	61
21	29	55	18	13	53	22	60	27
47	44	96	99	94	68	89	62	9
02	4	74	25	40	86	57	42	31
76	2	92	63	10	88	68	16	1
65	93	45	11	81	90	72	24	9
28	77	67	41	49	36	48	02	17
79	15	69	75	8	56	88	85	82
43	19	38	23	78	83	80	51	33
70	95	89	12	98	52	59	76	3

A TEN-POUND PRIZE.

(See Next Page.)

On the next page is a puzzle picture composed of 80 squares. If these squares be rearranged in a certain order they will form a real picture.

We offer a prize of £10 to the first person who sends the correct solution. In order to give readers in all parts of the United Kingdom as equal a chance as possible, the whole of the solutions received at 17, Henrietta Street in any one day will be considered together. In the very unlikely chance of two or more correct solutions being included in one day's post, the prize will be given to the sender of the *neatest* one. A Consolation Prize will be awarded to the sender of every correct solution who is not the winner of the £10.

If no correct solution be received on or before Tuesday, February 4th, 1896, the Ten-Pound Prize will be given to the sender of the solution then to hand which is most nearly correct.

Pictures should be packed flat or folded, not rolled, and the outside wrapper must be marked "January."

N.B.—To make the puzzle more difficult some of the squares have been turned upside down.

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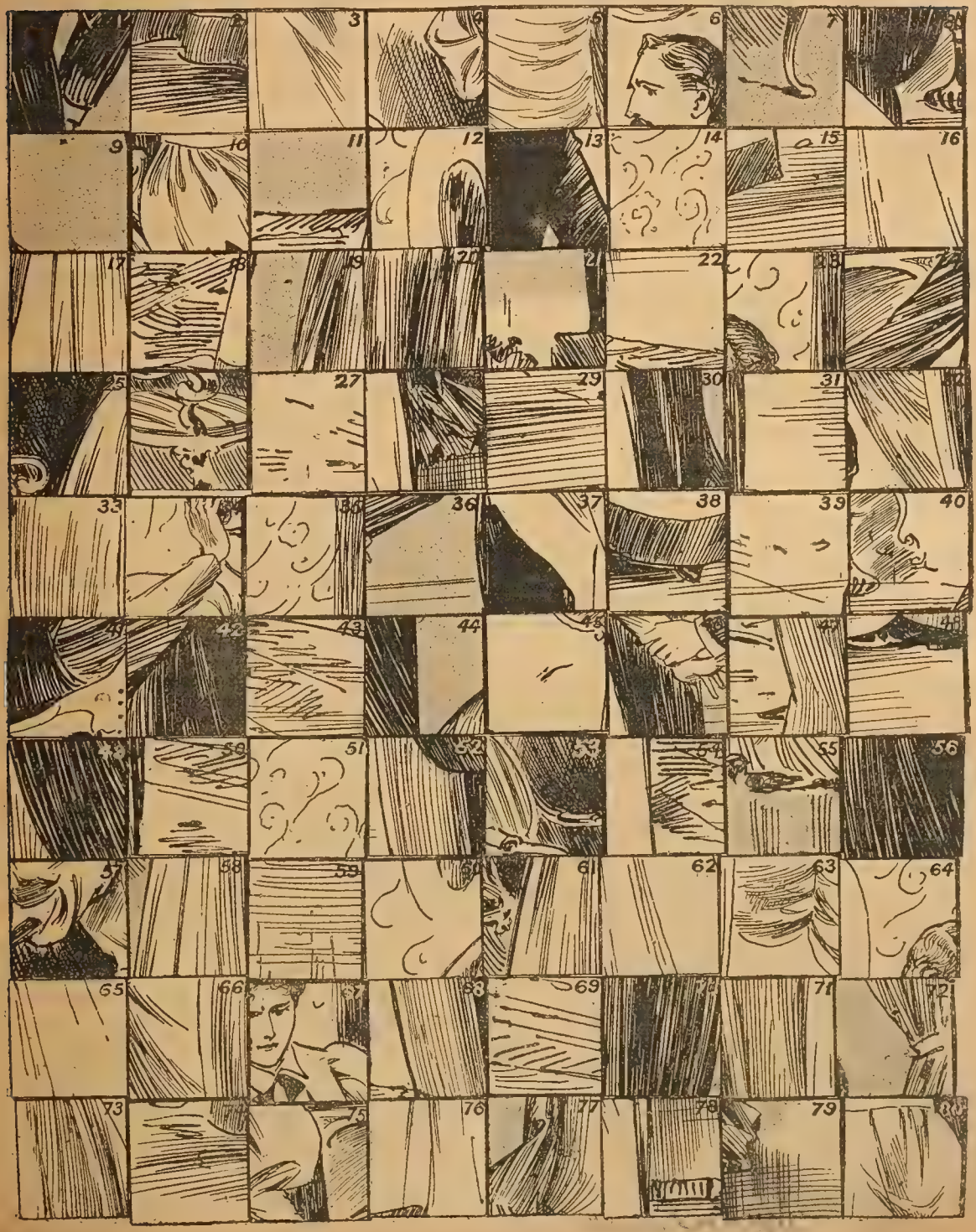
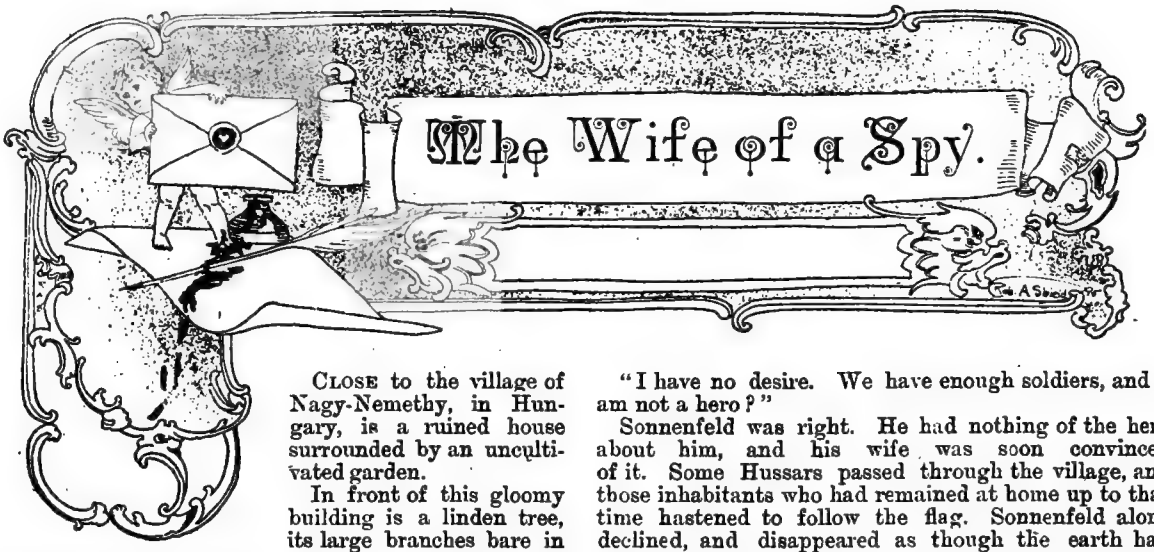
PUZZLE ✻ PICTURE.

(SEE OPPOSITE PAGE.)





The Wife of a Spy.

Close to the village of Nagy-Nemethy, in Hungary, is a ruined house surrounded by an uncultivated garden.

In front of this gloomy building is a linden tree, its large branches bare in summer as in winter. Nearly fifty years ago, when people awakened on all sides and began to shake off their chains, this house was inhabited by a young Jewish family, Adolph Sonnenfeld, a grain dealer, and his wife. While Sonnenfeld by his appearance bore no special resemblance to other members of his race, being blonde, rosy, and thin, like a German, Egla was a real Jewish woman, beautiful, intelligent, and calm, with dark, passionate eyes, small mouth, and disdainful lips.

Sonnenfeld and his wife loved each other tenderly. Egla even went so far as to love her husband more than her country, which is saying a good deal, for she was an exalted and ardent Hungarian patriot. She read the Magyar poetry with a feverish interest, and rejoiced in the growth of the revolution which was spreading in Hungary. Her favourite revolutionary heroes were Petoefi and Kossuth. Believing in a better future, she inculcated in her children an affection for their country and the passion of love and independence. Restricted to the narrow limits of her household, Egla led a rigorously feminine existence.

But when the February revolution broke out in Paris, soon followed by that of Vienna and the uprising of the Hungarians, her character, which had long surpassed the ordinary in its measure of energy, soon showed itself in full force. She began by interesting herself in the debates of the Diet, and then in the threatening conflict between the Government and the populace in Vienna, and in the first scenes of the civil war. When she learnt, in the month of October, that the Hungarian army had arrived at the gates of Vienna, she could no longer repress her feelings.

"Adolph!" she cried one morning at the breakfast table, throwing down the newspaper, "everyone is taking up arms for the country—old men, women, and children have not hesitated to sacrifice themselves. Do you intend to remain behind?"

"Are you crazy?" cried Sonnenfeld, with an indignant and almost frightened air. "What does the Hungarian liberty matter to me? I am a Jew, and, even if I should have an idea of going to war, people would laugh at me, for I don't even know how to load a gun."

"You can learn."

"I have no desire. We have enough soldiers, and I am not a hero?"

Sonnenfeld was right. He had nothing of the hero about him, and his wife was soon convinced of it. Some Hussars passed through the village, and those inhabitants who had remained at home up to that time hastened to follow the flag. Sonnenfeld alone declined, and disappeared as though the earth had swallowed him up. He was not seen again until the last soldier had quitted Nagy-Nemethy.

Egla then learnt that he had concealed himself in the cellar, where the cook carried him his food. She was filled with disgust. Her first impulse was to take her two children and leave this man, whom she could no longer love; but Sonnenfeld besought her so—he poured out so many tears, and his weeping children so well pleaded his cause—that Egla remained with him. From that day onwards she treated him with a disdainful coolness that affected him much more than reproaches and frequent quarrels would have done.

Shortly after this the first detachment of light horsemen arrived at Nagy-Nemethy. They were soon followed by a brigade which established its camp near the village. Some of the soldiers were billeted on the inhabitants, and the general selected Sonnenfeld's house for himself. The Jew surpassed himself in hospitality and servile demonstrations. He cringed like a dog before the general, and was, in consequence, treated as such by the officer.

Egla (who, being timid and hostile, kept out of the way) saw the general kick her husband out of the house one day. The sight made the blood rush to her face, but she concealed her trouble and suffered in silence.

Some days later the Hungarian Hussars exchanged a few shots with the Imperialists, and at night the Hungarians advanced from all sides and threatened to surround the Austrian brigade.

Egla dressed herself hurriedly. She noticed that her husband had crept slyly out of the house, and she went down to look for him. She soon saw him, talking with the general, who smiled graciously, while Sonnenfeld bowed humbly to him. She did not know why, but the general's smile caused her more anguish than the kicking he had given her husband. She could only hear isolated phrases of the conversation, but she soon understood that the general complained because he had found no one among the population disposed to act as a spy, not even among the poor Jews. She also heard Sonnenfeld assure the general of his devotion, then the two men separated.

At sunset the Imperialists had disappeared. An aide-de-camp had brought to the general orders to

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abandon this position and move towards the south with his brigade.

Throughout this winter campaign in Hungary each day brought contradictory news. Egla was agitated and sorrowful. She could not sleep at night.

Business was at a standstill. Sonnenfeld alone showed any activity, a fact which greatly worried his wife. He furnished provisions of all kinds for the Imperial troops. Suspicious-looking men often came to see him, and after each visit Sonnenfeld went away from the house for some time. Egla, with heavy heart, watched him with increasing mistrust.

One winter's day some Hussars, with their carbines loaded, suddenly appeared in the village. They were loudly acclaimed, and the joy increased when they were followed by a battalion of infantry. The Hungarians halted, threw out pickets in all directions, and began to prepare their dinner. The inhabitants generously gave up all they possessed to recompense the brave Hungarian soldiers for their fatigues and sufferings. Egla, not being able to follow this example without her husband's consent, began to look for him, as he had suddenly disappeared. After she had searched in vain about the house and neighbourhood, an evil suspicion began to force itself upon her.

At night, when all the inhabitants of Nagy-Nemethy were asleep, Egla remained awake. Seated upon her bed, she listened to the slightest noise. It seemed to her that something terrible was going to happen—something which she had felt coming for a long time. She remained thus for an hour or two; then, worn out, she fell asleep.

Suddenly she was awakened by musketry shots and a confused roar. Horses thundered by at a gallop, drums beat, and officers cried out their orders. The shots sounded closer; she opened her window, and a ball struck the wall beside her. She drew back quickly and extinguished the light.

The struggle went on in the streets. The Imperial troops had returned, and in the darkness had surprised and attacked the Hungarian infantry with superior forces. A very small number of Hungarians succeeded in escaping with their flag; the rest were killed or made prisoners.

Egla, her ideas all confused, remained seated in her chamber. An hour passed; then she heard voices in the neighbouring room. One was that of her husband; the other, clear, vibrating, and foreign, evidently accustomed to command, thanked Sonnenfeld, and promised him a handsome reward.

While the Imperial troops, and her husband with them, retired towards the east, Egla muffled up her children and hastened to her parents' house. Having placed her children in security, on the third day she returned home. Her husband was still absent. During the following night he crept into his house like a thief. He was greatly agitated when he saw his wife come out of her room with a light in her hand. She placed the light upon the table, sat down, and questioned her husband as coldly and severely as a judge on the bench.

"Where have you been?"

"I have made an important transaction. I have furnished lard and bread to the general."

"You have furnished him with something else. You have betrayed your brothers!" cried the Jewess, red with anger. "You are a spy!"

"What do you mean?" cried Sonnenfeld, turning pale.

"I heard your conversation with the general."

"Well, and what then?" he said, trying to smile.

The beautiful Jewess arose and looked at him steadily. "What then?" said she; "you are a traitor and deserve death. But I have loved you, and I do not want to see the name I still bear disgraced. I do not wish to have you die on the scaffold. You shall kill yourself here in this chamber!"

"You have lost your reason!" cried Sonnenfeld, in a shaking voice.

Egla calmly took out a pistol. "You must die!" she continued; "you are so degraded that I do not dare even to think of the frightful crime you have committed. If you are too cowardly to kill yourself I will execute you in the name of the country!"

She raised her pistol and aimed at the wretch's breast. He threw himself on his knees, and implored her pardon in agonising cries. The determined woman looked at him with irrepressible scorn; then she lowered her arm. "Yes, you are right; you are not even worth the powder."

Egla returned to her room and locked the door. When she felt sure that her husband was asleep, she threw a shawl over her head, and left the house.

The day had scarcely dawned when a number of cavalrymen appeared before Sonnenfeld's abode. The door was soon broken in, and some Hungarian Hussars, guided by Egla, went up to the chamber where the Jew was calmly sleeping.

"There is the spy!" she cried haughtily; "I want to see him hanged!"

Sonnenfeld still begged her to be merciful, but she remained inexorable. The Hussars bound his hands behind his back and led him out. With an imperturbable calm, his wife saw him hanged to a branch of the linden tree in front of his house. As soon as the execution was finished, she mounted a horse that the Hussars gave to her, and started off with them on the gallop.

At the attack on Waitzen a woman, carrying the Hungarian banner, led one of the infantry battalions. It was Egla, the valiant Jewess of Nagy-Nemethy. When the Poles of the Mazuchelli regiment carried the Komorn Hill at the point of the bayonet, it was Egla who encouraged them. Already struck with two balls, she fell, pierced by a bayonet stroke, on the tattered flag, and dyed it with her blood. N. N.

The Second Number of "PEARSON'S MAGAZINE" will be published on the First of February.

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That Beautiful Widow.

"Roasted quails, waiter, half-a-dozen oysters, and a bottle of your best Moselle—that will do, I think; and for dessert——"

"Yes, sir," quoth the attendant obsequiously.

"A few grapes and an ice cream. And, waiter!"

"Sir?"

"Don't forget plenty of olives."

"No, sir."

And the waiter whisked out of the room with the peculiar bustling movement that belongs to the genus, while Mr. Gustavus Lynmore quietly walked up to the bright anthracite fire, and stood stroking his moustache before the mantle mirror with a face expressive of the mildest contentment with himself and all the world besides. He was a tall, distinguished-looking man, with brilliant black eyes, hair like ripples of glossy jet, and a carefully preserved figure, and yet there was something in Mr. Lynmore's large Spanish orbs not altogether trustworthy.

"Upon my word," soliloquised Mr. Lynmore, eyeing himself complacently, "there's a good deal in—well, I won't say cheek, for it's a vulgar word—confidence is at once more elegant and more expressive. Now here I am, Gustavus Adolphus Lynmore, without ten pounds in my pocket, and without as much as that in any banking establishment, and yet I walk into the first hotel in the city, order the most expensive dinners, and insist on the most elegant rooms. And what's more I get 'em. As for the beggarly landlord wanting his bill, why, that's a future consideration. He ought to be willing to entertain a man of my style gratuitously; it gives a *je ne sais quoi* to the establishment, if the paltry-minded fellow only knew it. Hallo! here's a grey hair in my moustache! Gustavus Adolphus, it's time you were thinking of settling yourself. Bother grey hairs!"

Mr. Lynmore plucked out the offensive thread of silver, and strode up and down the room in some perturbation, pausing finally at the window, and looking abstractedly out upon the tide of life flowing on in the great thoroughfare below.

"By Jupiter; that's a pretty woman!"

He stopped short, transfixed by sudden admiration, as the afternoon sunshine, slanting in direct beams of murky gold into the second-storey window opposite, lighted up a bright head bending over some absorbing bit of fancy work.

"Much obliged to you, my friend, the sunshine," pondered Gustavus. "An opera-glass couldn't be better. Black dress, loops of black ribbon at the throat, fastened by a jet clasp. Aha! a young widow. And beautiful enough to drive a fellow distracted."

Beautiful she was, indeed, in the full light of that February sunset, with her glimmering golden hair, and the evanescent carnation of her round cheeks, and the royal poise of her slender, column-like throat. Gustavus Lynmore was a perfect critic of a woman—a man who had travelled all the world over, and looked at a beautiful face as dispassionately as he looked at a fine picture or a first-class statue—but even Gustavus was struck by the fair profile at the window.

"Never saw a lovelier set of features in my life," mused Lynmore, with something like an enthusiastic throb at the withered portion of anatomy that he called, by courtesy, his heart. "Upon my word, that woman wouldn't discredit the name of Mrs. Lynmore. Wonder if she's rich? She must be, though, to live in the parlour floor of the Celandine Hotel. Women can't play the confidence game as men do; they're obliged to have some sort of a base to start from.

"Oh, she must be rich; there can't be a shadow of doubt about it—rich and pretty, and a widow. Gustavus, my boy, you must see about this business, there's undoubtedly an opportunity for you. Hallo! a tow-headed little boy, as sure as I'm a living sinner, with his head on the pretty crape shoulder! Confound all incumbrances, say I. But then, perhaps it wouldn't make so much difference if there was plenty of cash in the locker. I really must take this matter into consideration. What's that, waiter? Dinner? Very well, let it be served at once. Do you hear?"

Mr. Lynmore sat down with an appetite that was enhanced by an occasional glimpse of the golden head and rosy cheeks at the window across the street.

"There, she sees me," he pondered. "She sees me, for I saw her smile behind those lovely ringlets, and now she has vanished from the casement. Hallo, waiter!"

The waiter paused from his task of clearing the table.

"Sir?"

"The fourth window on the left-hand side, parlour floor at the Celandine—I've an idea it would be a very nice room to have, in case I leave this hotel."

"Yes, sir," said the waiter, coughing doubtfully behind his hand, and secretly hoping that so very stylish a gentleman would remain at the St. Aubrey.

"I suppose you can tell me the number of the room?"

"Certainly, sir. I used to be hall-boy at the Celandine,

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sir, afore I came here. Fourth window on the left-hand side, sir, parlour floor? why, it's twenty-nine."

"Twenty-nine, eh? Thank you, waiter, I'm very much obliged to you."

And the waiter withdrew, feeling as grateful to Mr. Gustavus Lynmore as if that gentleman had tossed a shilling at him, instead of a few gracious words. Such is the effect of manner in this world.

Half an hour or so afterwards, Mr. Lynmore strolled accidentally into a fashionable florist's establishment where heliotrope and azaleas gave a tropic glow to the colourless plate-glass.

"Jansen, I want a very choice bouquet."

"Certainly, Mr. Lynmore. What style?"

"Well, plenty of white flowers—you know how to express that sort of thing—humble devotion and unobtrusive admiration."

"Yes, sir, I comprehend; I'll endeavour to put the sentiment into shape," replied the æsthetic florist, carefully writing down the order in a red morocco-bound book. "I suppose you are aware we charge something extra for these ideal bouquets?"

"Expense is no object," said Lynmore. "Send it to Room number 29, Celandine Hotel, this evening."

"Mr. Lynmore, if I might venture to remind you of the little bill you left unliquidated here a year ago——"

"Bill? Oh, yes—how could I be so careless! I'll certainly attend to it immediately. Jansen; much obliged to you for reminding me of it."

The waiter withdrew.

The next morning Mr. Lynmore had the gratification of seeing his "ideal bouquet" in a Parisian vase between the lace draperies in the fourth window on the left side, and, moreover, of beholding the pretty widow's Grecian nose occasionally dipping daintily among the fragrant blossoms, with the bright hair falling around like a mist of gold.

"I must find out who she is," thought Gustavus. "She knows the bouquet was from here, for I caught her shy half-arch glance, just this minute—the very glance to shoot from a widow's cerulean eyes. But the question is, how to do it? I can't go over to the Celandine, because I boarded there six weeks last year, and came away without paying my bill."

Thus mused Mr. Gustavus Adolphus Lynmore, as he smoked his Havana by the sunshiny window of his exquisitely comfortable little private parlour.

"As I live," thought Gustavus, elevating his eyebrows, "there's Jenkisson rushing across the street like a racehorse. Now I never run; if there's anything plebeian it's haste; but Jenkisson always was eccentric. He's coming here; eh, what? lifting his hat to the divinity at the Celandine. He knows her!"

And Gustavus Lynmore, forgetting his recent sweeping condemnation of haste, ran downstairs, and clapped his old acquaintance cordially on the shoulder.

"Jenkisson, old fellow, what brings you here?"

"How d'ye do, Lynmore? Excuse me, but I'm in a hurry. Steamer sails at twelve, and it's after eleven now. Is that baggage ready, Mike?"

"Yes; but hold on just a minute. I want——"

"Want what?"

"I only want to know who that lady is you bowed to just now."

"Lady—what lady?"

"At the Celandine Hotel."

"Oh, yes—the Celandine. Why, it's Harry Burke's widow—Harry Burke that went off to California, and made a fortune, and died there two years ago."

"Rich, eh?"

"Rich as Crœsus. But I say, Gus, you needn't go making eyes at her: it's no use, for—carriage ready, eh? Well, good-bye, Gus."

So saying, Mr. Jenkisson precipitated himself into the vehicle, dragging his portmanteau and travelling rug after him, Gustavus looking after him with a smile of ineffable contempt curling his graceful lip.

"Poor, dear, blundering Jenkisson, how very transparent your shallow malice is! I needn't make eyes at her, eh? I shall probably follow my own will and inclination in this matter as in others. I'll have a bouquet all white and pink rosebuds, with a japonica in the centre this time, and slip my card in among them."

Mr. Lynmore strolled out upon the portico, smiling amiably the while, to reconnoitre the passers-by and display his unexceptionable costume.

"What a very nice little boy!" said Gustavus, stooping to pick up the hoop-stick that had rolled close to the step, and restoring it with a caress. "What's your name?"

"Harry Burke," lisped the tow-headed boy, looking very shyly at the affable stranger.

"Harry, eh? A very pretty name," pursued Gustavus, patting the tow-head. "And doesn't Harry want to go and take a walk with me?"

"No."

"Not if we go to a sweet-shop, and afterwards to a toy-shop?"

Harry Burke's seven-year-old integrity was not proof

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against such glittering temptations as these; he succumbed at once, and trotted off, hand-in-hand with the enticing stranger.

"A good move," thought Gustavus. "Mothers are such fools, you can reach 'em through their children without the least difficulty. I know one thing, though, I'll pack the little nuisance off to a boarding-school the first thing after we're married."

Master Harry, all unconscious of the dreadful fate awaiting him, went home to his mamma, in a high state of stickiness from various sweets, and loaded down with toys, and directly afterwards a bouquet of rosebuds arrived, containing one of Mr. Lynmore's aristocratically-engraved cards.

"Dear me, how polite!" said the lovely widow. "But, then, darling Harry wins all hearts."

Darling Harry, forsooth!

The next day Harry went to the park, and a new volume of poems in tinted paper and creamy Turkey binding was sent to Harry's mamma; the next day a pearl ring was intrusted to the youth for his mother; the next a pony was hired for Harry to ride, and that evening a diamond of the purest water, set in a narrow hoop of gold, was sent up to room No. 29, with Mr. Lynmore's compliments. Nor did the lovely widow spurn these gifts.

"That settles the matter," quoth Gustavus Adolphus decidedly. "To-morrow I'll take Harry to the menagerie, and in the evening I'll call, landlord or no landlord, and declare my sentiments. We have read each other's eyes long ago."

Harry was quite willing to be taken to the abode of savage beasts and wild birds.

"Mamma is very glad to have me go," said the artless youth. "She's engaged with company."

"Ah, indeed," said Gustavus, wincing a little, as the capering lad trod ever and anon upon his most sensitive corn, and mentally exclaiming: "You'll be packed off to a boarding-school, or I'll know the reason why!"

Mr. Lynmore endured the zoological exhibition with the utmost calmness and philosophy, and when the last serpent was safely coiled up in his iron cage, went home with the rejoicing Harry.

"For I really must wind this thing up," soliloquised Gustavus. "I've run entirely out of cash, and, what's more, I'm head and ears in debt for the bouquets and rings, and all these incidental expenses, including the brat. My darling," he said, aloud, in a honeyed voice, "will you ask your mamma if she will please favour me with a brief interview?"

Five minutes passed away—five nervous interminable minutes—while Mr. Lynmore sat in mortal dread of the landlord of the Celandine Hotel, and apprehension as to what reception might be accorded to his message. Presently, however, Master Harry came jumping down, two steps at a time.

"Mamma says, will you please to come up."

Mr. Lynmore promptly followed his small guide up the stairs, his heart thumping behind his waistcoat.

"Here he is, mamma!" bawled the boy, flinging the door wide open.

There stood the golden-haired beauty in a lustrous dress of richest white silk, with diamonds circling her throat like a tiny line of light, and flashing on her blue-veined wrists, and there, moreover, stood a tall, dashing-looking gentleman, in white gloves and a white waistcoat. Gustavus Adolphus stood rooted to the floor.

"I am so glad to meet you, Mr. Lynmore," lisped the lady, advancing, "and to introduce you to Mr. Wyndham, my husband."

"Your—husband!"

"Yes; we were married this morning; and I was so much obliged to you for taking Harry out of the way. You see, children are objectionable at such a time."

Gustavus opened his lips and shut them spasmodically, without uttering a word.

"And," went on the blue-eyed divinity, with merciless sweetness, "I have laid aside every one of your elegant presents for dear little Harry until he is old enough to appreciate them. We are going to take the sweet child to the Continent with us to-morrow, but I'm sure he'll never forget his kind friend."

Mr. Lynmore bowed mechanically, and got out of the room, he never knew exactly how. One thing connected with his retreat, however, he had disagreeable occasion to remember.

"That little bill of mine, you'll recollect, Mr. Lynmore," said a husky voice close to his ear. "If it's convenient to settle——"

"But it isn't convenient" groaned Lynmore, with a bitter recollection of the diamond ring and the hot-house flowers.

"Oh, very well. Here, Jennings?"

And Mr. Lynmore, the cosmopolitan, found himself arrested on the charge of attempting to defraud the landlord of the Celandine Hotel out of the paltry sum of £40.

So ended his courtship, and so ended, at least for the time being, his dreams of "marrying rich."

RICHARD SIBERT.

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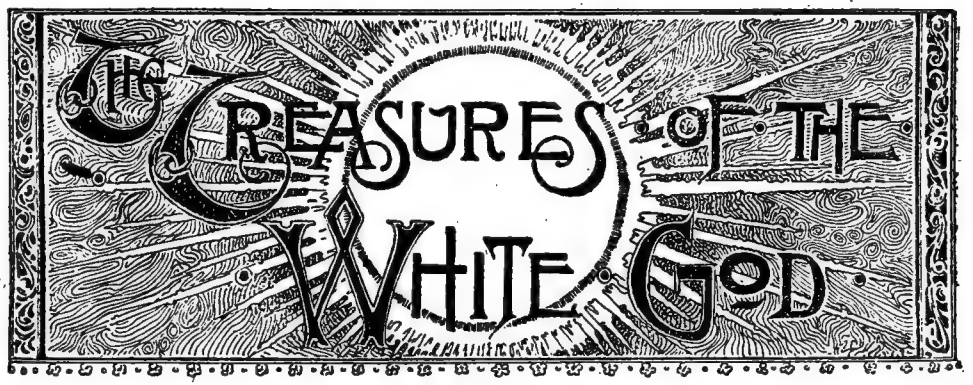

The Story of a Shameful Crime.

CHAPTER XVII.

"EUREKA!"

THE two boys had regarded Burgoyne's manifest excitement and agitation with awed perturbation. They shrank back, vaguely startled, as, after that fruitless inspection of the book cover, he fixed his eyes, snapping, eager and questioning, upon them.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"Found it," blurted out one of the lads.

"Where?"

"Over yonder."

As he spoke the urchin indicated a spot relatively near to the school-house.

"Where I cast it away, or thereabouts!" murmured Burgoyne. "It must have lain there until——When did you find it?" he queried, aloud.

"Just a bit ago."

"You—you did not notice anything by the side of it, or near it?"

"What, sir?"

"A piece of paper—a folded strip?"

The boy shook his head dissentingly.

"Yes, we did find something," interpolated the other lad.

"Ah!" ejaculated Burgoyne eagerly.

"Inside of it."

"Yes, yes! go on," directed Burgoyne, quivering with anxiety.

"Just as you say, sir—a piece of paper, folded."

"It is the key!" breathed Burgoyne tumultuously. "Speak, boy! Where was it?"

"In a little pocket at the back of the cover, sir."

"It is what I am looking for," announced Burgoyne, scarcely able to control his eagerness.

"It was a piece of stiff white writing paper, and we used it for a messenger."

"To the kite?"

"Yes, sir. See! If you look sharp you can see it right up against the kite."

Adrian Burgoyne thrilled at the disclosure. He had traced the precious cipher alphabet, but how strangely! Accidentally the boys had stumbled over it. In lieu of other material, they had used it to enhance their sport of kite-flying.

He trembled as he reflected that, in setting it on the string, they might have mutilated it. He shielded his eyes from the sun, and gazed aloft. The kite was "nearly out of sight," to employ a juvenile term, and only a slight variation in shadow at its far-distant centre indicated the presence of some foreign object there—"the messenger!"

To think of it! Aloft a thousand feet or more, the sport of varying breezes, the key to a clear million in hard cash was tantalisingly in sight, but out of immediate reach. The peculiar communication unnerved Burgoyne seriously. He hurried to where the other boys were gathered. He amazed the owner of the kite by seizing the string.

The stiff breeze drew the cord taut as a straining ship's cable. In his eagerness and excitement Burgoyne began to pull it in.

"Hold on! don't do that, mister!" spoke the owner of the kite.

"But you've sent up as a messenger a paper belonging to me," explained Burgoyne, "and I want it at once!"

"Yes, sir, that's all right; only, if you don't pull in gently, you'll snap the string, and——"

"Broke loose!" interrupted an excited voice.

The very catastrophe the lad had predicted took place at just that moment.

Twang! The cord gave an ominous snap; the parted strands flitted away like the wings of a fleet bird. In dismay, Burgoyne contemplated the results of his rashness.

"Catch it! get the kite, the messenger. I'll give a handful of money to the boy who finds it first!"

The boys started away at full speed. As to Burgoyne, unused to scientific pirouettes and swift divings of the sky-sailer, he only gazed blankly at it as it bore away to the west, and disappeared over the edge of the forest.

The boys had plunged into the timber. As the school-bell rang they reappeared one by one.

"Got to get to school, mister," vouchsafed the owner of the kite. "If you can wait until after, we'll make another search for it. There was lots of string out, you see, and it's gone a long way."

Burgoyne set about tracing the missing kite himself. He penetrated the forest, he anxiously inspected the tree tops.

His heart took vivid hope as he came across a dangling string. Following this with his eyes as it ran from tree to tree, he finally came to a giant elm. Among its highest branches the white face of the kite showed. He had found it at last.

An expert climber, he soon had it out of its aerial perch. His eyes dilated with suspense as he sat down on the ground and drew it towards him.

Yes, there was "the messenger," a folded piece of worn writing paper. A small hole penetrated its centre. He

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removed it from the string. With trembling fingers he opened it.

"Eureka!"

One spontaneous cry broke from his lips. Into his anxious face sprang the glow of hope and triumph supreme.

The characters were intact; they were identical with those contained in the original parchment message, and with the transcription tattooed in india ink on his fore-arm.

He clasped the little fragment of paper in his hand as if it was a jewel, a pearl of value inestimable.

He had torn a strip from the newspaper front of the kite, and folded the alphabet key in it.

Pressing hurriedly forward, Adrian Burgoyne sought some sheltered, secluded spot, where, unobserved, uninterrupted, he might study out the mystic cipher—translate the signs that held hidden the secret of the hiding-place of dead Ralph Ringold's fortune.

At last, after a swift, desultory walk, he paused. He had come to an overgrown garden, and he crawled through a break in its high picket fence.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, looking round him, with a queer start. "Singular; but this is the same spot where I slept the night after I first saw Patrice."

Singular? Yes, fateful, too. It was destiny that had guided his erratic steps hither, although at that moment Adrian Burgoyne little dreamt it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Dead to the World.

At last!

Adrian Burgoyne drew a long, fervent sigh of relief and satisfaction combined, and lifted his eyes from the engrossing labour of hours.

Noon had come and gone, the sun was swinging far in the west, and yet he had pored over the scrawl in his hand, and compared it with the tattoo chronicle on his arm until every character was as familiar to him as an English letter, until he had translated coherently, unmistakably, the message that bore the dying secret of his friend, Ralph Rignold.

There could be no question as to the directions the message contained, but as Burgoyne traced their true import he realised that he was just entering a new realm of mysticism and adventure.

Translated, the cipher message read:

"In the old monastery of San Miguel, near Guayli, Mexico, lives a sect of priests of the old *régime*. They are under close governmental favour, which has vested in them full legal claim to the old church, the monastery, and surrounding territory.

"Near the monastery is the cave of Bureldo. Here are stored idols, relics, and antiquities of the ancient Aztecs. A wild, half-savage tribe, claiming to be direct descendants of Montezuma, dwell in the cliffs surrounding it, and guard the cave as holy ground, day and night.

"Although at religious variance, the priests and the Aztec devotees are friends, the former possessing an official domination over the fanatics.

"In this cave, two years since, I hid for a week, to escape the rigours of a provincial insurrection. My treasure, secured from the mountains, I had brought with me. Harassed by my enemies outside, fearful of discovery by the fanatics, I secreted this treasure, and managed to escape unseen.

"If anything should happen to me, my friends and the friends of my darling child, Patrice, must obtain this treasure. It will be difficult to secure entrance to the cave, so rigidly guarded, so frequently visited by the devotees. This must be done by strategy or force.

"Once accomplished, look for the idol known as The White God. It is a stone image, and is placed in a niche far back in the caves. It is known to the Aztec fanatics as the oldest idol in America.

"Within this hollowed-out block of stone I hid my treasure, and sealed it up with the natural cement the rocks of the cave afford. Break it, or dig out the cement, purchase or carry away the idol, but there is the fortune that will make my orphan daughter heiress to a million."

"The secret out!—the clue revealed at last!" breathed Adrian Burgoyne fervidly, as he completed the translation of the message. "My course is plain as to the treasure. It has escaped the knowledge of my enemies. I alone know where it is hidden. Mexico—the cave of Bureldo—the White God—the treasure—wealth for the woman I love. But what of Patrice?—where is Patrice?"

He sank his head into his hands and reflected. Soul and mind immersed in profoundest meditation, Adrian Burgoyne faced the solution of the problem of safety, happiness, security for the future.

That future spread before him in positive outline. He had a work to do, and that labour was clearly defined.

After almost incredible trouble, after rigorous hardship, torture, imprisonment, the menace of death itself, he found himself the possessor of a secret involving the possession of a fortune rivalling the ransom of a king, the dowry of a princess.

It belonged where his heart belonged—to Patrice Ringold. For her it should be secured, and it would be a welcome, self-sacrificial task to endow her with its possession. Once she was placed beyond the reach of want and poverty, vested with her legal rights, safe from the power of her enemies, would her true, womanly heart speak? Would she say: "Friend, beloved, you have worked out a noble duty; together we will share its reward?"

Then, to forget the past; to hasten to some distant clime, safe from the dread of the plots of enemies.

No! A grim, set resolve showed in the thinker's face, as he realised that not until he had unmasked Richard Sheldon and his evil-souled emissary, Colonel Lytle; not until the long score of blight, suffering, and torture he owed these two inhuman fiends was wiped out in atonement; not until they had paid that tragic debt, woe for woe, torture for torture, heart-break for heart-break, and he, Adrian Burgoyne, had been vindicated, rehabilitated, an honest, innocent victim, in the eyes of his fellow-men, would he be content.

That firm, holy resolve strengthened mind and soul to steady, tireless endeavour. He formulated his plans for the immediate future. First, a quest for Patrice—then, the treasure.

They believed him dead; those cruel enemies of his, the watch-dogs of the law, were off their guard. In his changed identity he could boldly penetrate the open streets and the police-patrolled by-ways of the city alike in safety.

A quaint conceit came to Adrian Burgoyne's mind as he sat beneath the shadow of the high bushes and reflected. He felt that with the hour a new destiny had begun; that, fully armed and equipped, he was about to start out upon a new career, like some valiant knight-errant bent on championing the cause of a fair, faithful lady-love.

He must adopt a new name—anyone would do, but he must sink all trace of Adrian Burgoyne. *He* was dead. Would he ever be able to write "Redivivus" above his memory? Nay. Not until the long case was ended, villainy unmasked, and innocence surely vindicated and triumphant.

From a rubbish heap of leaves, dead vines, and the trimmings of numberless rose-bushes near at hand, he drew a piece of smooth thin wood that lay there, and its new surface attracted him. With a peculiar smile he cut it to a rounding edge.

Then with his knife he dug a little trench at his side. From a pocket he next drew a small brass object. It was a metal tag, the last memento he possessed of his dreary prison career. It bore the number 407.

He placed it in the trench. Over it he heaped the dirt, until it formed a miniature grave-mound; then, with a

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pencil, he traced over the smooth surface of the impromptu tombstone the words:

"Sacred to the memory of Convict 407, Adrian Burgoyne. Died——," and the date followed. "Murdered by the law! Resurgam!"

Yes, he should rise again, indeed, far above the calumnies of his enemies, far beyond their power of harm or influence!

He placed the erratic chronicle at the head of the little grave. He draped it fancifully with the ends of a delicate vine that grew in profusion about the spot. Then the interment was over. He had buried himself and the past in one common grave. Convict 407 was dead, with all his woes, sufferings, and wrongs. Rest in peace! Hail the new man, strong, resolute, daring to avenge his memory in that far day when he should stand face to face with his murderers!

The conceit pleased him. He rose and left the spot, crept through the fence, and gained the cliffs overlooking the town.

Fateful hour! Criminating chronicle of the mock grave! Had he ever dreamed what familiar eyes would one day view that fanciful legend in black, he would have rended to atoms the wooden tombstone, as if its existence was sinister as the breath of a pestilence!

Hail the new life! new energies, new ambitions, new motives! Buoyant, hopeful, bent on tracing his missing love, Adrian Burgoyne selected a narrow path, and went down towards the village.

Went down to mingle once more with his fellow-creatures—went down, though he knew it not, to meet as strange, as stormy, as tragic a fate as was ever meted out to mortal man!

CHAPTER XIX.

AT HIS GATES.

"NOT a trace; not a clue! What does it mean?"

Adrian Burgoyne asked himself the question in somewhat vague bewilderment and alarm.

Five days had passed since he had left the vicinity of Lynde, and it was just the evening previous that he had once more ventured to set foot in the streets of the city where he had met his fate, and had been conquered by it in the years agone.

What little money he had left of his scanty stock was almost all expended in giving the finishing touches to a toilet in accordance with his plans of disguise.

He now resembled in attire and mien a gentleman in struggling circumstances, a village doctor, a man not yet passed the verge of well-doing in the way of business, his natural dignity of manner and expressive eyes indicating an intelligence and breeding beyond the average of the ordinary person.

From early dusk until noon of the ensuing day at intervals he had watched the home of Richard Sheldon.

So far without success, however. The house seemed to have few occupants. He had caught sight of two maid servants, and of the ostler in the stable, but all the evening previous he had watched in vain for any sign of a light in the library and drawing-rooms of the house, and all that morning he had lingered in the vicinity uselessly, for no Richard Sheldon came down the polished marble steps to go to his business office, no Colonel Lytle drove up to call upon his friend and familiar in villainy.

"I cannot make it out," cogitated Burgoyne. "I shall have to begin a cautious and systematic series of inquiries."

He strolled through the court at the rear of Sheldon's residence, and observed the man of the stables more closely. If he meditated engaging him in a conversation concerning his employer and his probable whereabouts, Burgoyne dismissed the project from his mind at a second glance at him. That surly face and irritable manner proved the ostler to be no chatterer, and Burgoyne left the vicinity with a new and cautious plan outlined in his mind.

An hour later he reappeared. He bore in his hand a small leather handbag. It contained half-a-dozen bottles of some patent preparation for polishing furniture and the like, purchased cheaply. His plan was to canvass the immediate neighbourhood, ostensibly as a pedlar, and, while descanting on his wares, engage the servant who answered his call in conversation, tending to a discussion on the recent movements of Richard Sheldon.

A hint—a mere suggestion concerning the appearance of a strange young lady at Sheldon's house of late—a mere mention of some trivial fact thus gleaned—might be the starting clue to important and speedy disclosures. Adrian Burgoyne was detective enough to comprehend that.

He started in at the end of the square, going to the area doors of the houses at which he called, and meeting with the varied chary welcome and gruff incivility of repulse usually awarded the canvasser. He had just turned from a house bearing a doctor's sign, and was coming up the area steps, when he ran almost plump against a man hastening precipitately to the very door he had just left.

"Excuse me, sir!" gasped out the man. "Do you know—Oh! sir, are you the doctor?"

Evidently his acquaintance with the physician he sought was decidedly limited, his words bespoke that. His last palpitating query, too, revealed the fact that Burgoyne's dignified manner and the little hand-bag he carried gave him quite a professional appearance, and the fact that he was just leaving the doctor's explained the excited caller's mistake in crediting him with being a physician.

"No. The doctor——"

There Adrian Burgoyne paused, for a second glance at the man caused a variety of exciting suggestions to flash through his quick mind. In a moment he recognised the other. It was Sheldon's ostler.

Some startling occurrence at that domicile had evidently started him on a speedy and excited mission, for he was scarcely coherent, so agitated was he.

Eagerly seizing Burgoyne's arm, he pleaded earnestly.

"Not the doctor? Perhaps his assistant, then? Oh, sir! I see you have your medicine case with you. It's a case of life and death. Every moment may be fatal. Please come doctor, if only for a minute. It's only a step or two."

Adrian Burgoyne was borne perforce out into the street and down the walk by his wilful companion. The latter began pouring his tale of woe into his ears, volubly and distractedly, and ere Burgoyne found an opportunity to disclaim the professional character attributed to him, he was fairly at Sheldon's door.

He thrilled to vague augury and hesitation as he realised what a strange combination of circumstances was doing for him—ushering him across the threshold of the very house whose mysteries he had so craved to explore. Should he falter or draw back? No. Confident in his disguise, certain that his visit was the initial step to possibly important discoveries, he remained mute. The ostler had insisted upon accepting him as a duly accredited physician. Well, be it so!

"What is the matter—what has happened?" asked Burgoyne, as the man ushered him into the reception room.

"The serving maid, sir. You see, it's all my fault, but she would tipple. I had a bottle of embrocation for rubbing my horses, and I happened to leave it in a little cupboard in the laundry; she found it, thought it was liquor, and—oh! if it kills her will they hang me?"

"I fancy not; we must try and give her an antidote," said Burgoyne. "Have you notified your employer?" he questioned deftly.

"Mr. Sheldon? Oh, no, sir. He ain't here—won't be here to-day, lucky for me! for I'm sure he'd discharge me for my carelessness, he hates fuss so. Get her well, doctor,

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so he don't hear of it, and I'll pay you half my month's wages—anything, so she don't die, and me get the blame of it!"

A gratified expression came into Adrian Burgoyne's eyes. The agitation of the household of servants, and the absence of the master, promised well for a free field and the exercise to its fullest extent of the influence his supposed professional status gave him, in a plan to learn much that he wanted to know ere he again left the house.

The ostler led the way to a little room on the main floor. Here a woman-servant was wailing and frantically wringing her hands, while groaning in pain, tossing and frightened, was the white-faced victim of the poisoning.

Adrian Burgoyne had spent one year of his sojourn behind prison bars in the hospital of the gaol, as aid to the physician in charge, and that brief training in the healing art stood him in good stead now.

He gravely felt the pulse of the sufferer, who declared that her stomach was burning up, her throat scorched to a cinder, and her lungs ablaze. At a glance he discerned that she was more frightened than hurt, but he did not say so.

He examined, smelt, and tasted the contents of the bottle from which she had drunk. It was an ordinary horse embrocation, composed of liquids far more likely to produce nausea than active poisoning, and he knew that a drastic emetic would soon relieve the woman.

"I have no medicine with me that exactly meets this case," he announced to the frightened ostler, who hung upon his words as if they comprised the stored-up wisdom of an expert. "Go to the nearest chemist's and get this put up. You need not be alarmed; I can save the patient."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, doctor!" whimpered the unnerved oster gratefully.

"Only—I will have to watch the case for any possible recurrence of unfavourable symptoms later on, so as to be on hand to check the same."

The big words settled the conviction in the ostler's mind that luck had sent a second Mackenzie to his rescue at a critical moment, and he sped away, a relieved look on his face, to secure the emetic Burgoyne had ordered—a remedy so simple that the latter knew any druggist would prepare it, even on an unsigned and unofficial pencilled order.

The ostler was not long in returning. A glance at the patient, after the administering of the medicine, convinced Burgoyne that she was relieved, and out of all possible danger. He ordered libations of warm milk and perfect quiet, and announced to the ostler that he would remain for a little time, to see that she got on all right.

"Yes, sir. This way, doctor," spoke the man, servile and awed in the presence of such rare medical skill. "You will find it very comfortable in the library here."

He led the way into Richard Sheldon's favourite lounging-room as he spoke, and wheeled the easiest of all easy-chairs into position for his guest.

Adrian Burgoyne's eyes swept the room keenly. They found a rare object of interest in the magnificent writing-desk at his hand.

"Here are books and papers, sir," spoke the ostler, wheeling a little stand to where Burgoyne sat, but the latter waved a detaining hand.

"I would prefer to do a little writing. If you would not object, might I use the desk?"

"Certainly, sir—oh, most assuredly, doctor," exclaimed the voluble ostler, anxious to oblige his visitor, and hoping his accommodating ways and respectful words would pass current for coin in settling the doctor's final bill for services now that he was recovering from his fright.

He found a bunch of keys and unlocked the desk. He threw back the flexible top, and then, saying he would watch the invalid for half an hour and then report progress to the doctor, he left Burgoyne to himself.

"What fortune!"

His eager gaze sweeping the open desk before him, Adrian Burgoyne uttered the words.

What fortune, indeed! Half an hour alone with those pigeon-holes, and drawers, and portfolios, crammed full of the private documents of the man who held his fate and that of Patrice Ringold within his cruel power!

He thrilled as he realised how circumstances had aided a consummation never dreamt of in his wildest fancies.

He scribbled a few words on a blank tablet so as to feign a semblance of writing. He kept one ear bent towards the door, to be warned of an abrupt approach of the ostler, who had unwittingly placed his master's most cherished secrets at the mercy of a resolute enemy.

Then Adrian Burgoyne delved into the mass of papers before him. He scanned books of accounts, he conned pages of correspondence. He began his task curiously, eagerly. As it proceeded, his face grew grave, startled, serious, and finally, as accumulating surprises terminated in one last discovery that completely electrified him, he sprang to his feet with a wild, incredulous cry, his face a void of doubt, astonishment, and alarm.

"Impossible!" he gasped, staring blankly at three crumpled pieces of paper in his hand, selected from the mass before him. "Impossible!—incredible!"

Footsteps sounded at the door. Lost in a maze of overwhelming emotion, Adrian Burgoyne had just wit enough to thrust the papers in his hand into his pocket, and control his agitation in a slight degree, as the ostler appeared.

The face of the latter was jubilant.

"Oh, doctor!" he exclaimed, "how can we thank you? She's better, she's well, she's at work again, lively as ever."

"Yes? I am glad—I—I had better go," stammered Burgoyne incoherently, walking to the door like a man in a dream.

The ostler stared curiously at him. A queer-acting creature, this doctor he decided.

"And your bill, doctor?" he inquired deprecatingly, as he opened the massive front door.

"Nothing," choked out Burgoyne, and was down the steps with the celerity of a man fleeing from pestilence.

He hurried along the street, looking neither to the right nor to the left. His eyes were haunted with a new dread, his face was troubled, amazed, alarmed.

He never paused until he had reached a room in the attic of a broken-down house where he had engaged lodgings the day previous.

Once there, he sank down into the one rickety chair it contained. In a state of utter collapse, he stared vaguely, dreamily, out at the little window through which the garish light of day entered charily.

Mechanically he drew the documents from his pocket that he had surreptitiously secured from Richard Sheldon's writing-desk.

"Impossible!" he muttered, gasping at them with a hopeless, despairing eye—"incredible!"

(To be continued.)

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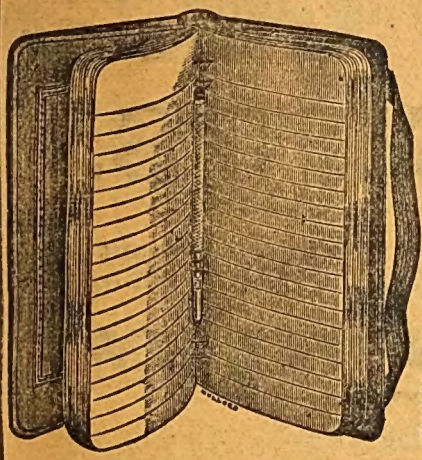

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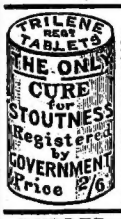

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